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ADVENTIST RESPONSES TO CROSS-CULTURAL MISSION

Global Mission Issues Committee Papers

Volume I
1998-2001

BRUCE L. BAUER, Editor

Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission

Global Mission Issues Committee Papers

Volume I

1998-2001

Bruce L. Bauer
Editor

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ANDREWS UNIVERSITY MISSION STUDIES—III

Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission

Volume I

Bruce L. Bauer
Editor

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Faith Development in Context: Presenting Christ in Creative Ways

Department of World Mission
Andrews University
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2006

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INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL RYAN

Mission has always been a foundational value of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Even prior to 1844, those who studied, prayed, and were led by the Spirit to the distinctive beliefs of the Adventist Church were passionate about sharing those truths with neighbors and countrymen. By the 1870s, the Church's definition of mission had grown to include the whole world. Seventh-day Adventists believed they were a special part of God's great plan to invite every person in the world to know Christ and the saving truths of the Bible.

By the year 1900, a small number of missionaries were serving in selected countries around the world. Over the next ninety years the number of missionaries increased and the Church grew rapidly in the Americas, the southern part of the continent of Africa, selected countries in Asia, and the Pacific islands. By 1990, there were 6 million members and the Church had a presence in more than 200 countries—all but 28 countries. A network of schools, hospitals, clinics, publishing houses, food factories, and radio stations served the Church in countries around the world. In 1990, every day, one new church was established and more than 1,000 people were baptized into church membership.

God be praised, the growth had been remarkable and a worldwide foundation had been established. And yet, it was as though God, in his all-knowing and caring wisdom, then began to move the Church to understand more fully the mission challenge that still remained. World population had exploded to 5.4 billion people. Several studies conducted by non-Seventh-day Adventists and data coming from inside the Church strongly suggested that the mission challenge was far greater than previously understood.

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The Church initiated a study to discover where the presence of the Church was located across the countries of the world. Membership and church locations were compared with populations in the context of territories that had been organized into groups of one million people. Of 5,400 segments (the world population in millions) data revealed that the Church did not have a presence in 2,300 of those million population segments.

Quickly it became apparent that the Adventist Church was best represented in rural, island, Christian, animistic, and poor areas in our world. In 1990, nearly half the world's population lived in cities and the vast majority held values represented by Islam, Communism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and a growing secular/postmodern generation. These world religions, governments, and ideologies held more than 70 percent of the world's population. These territories were becoming known as the 10/40 Window—the great Christian mission field of the world. In these areas the Seventh-day Adventist Church had only a small presence.

In 1990, the highest authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the General Conference in session, voted an initiative called Global Mission. Global Mission was mandated to establish a church in every segment of 1 million people. The action of the world church called for the establishment of religious study centers to develop methodologies and materials for advancing the mission of the Church into those great unentered areas of the world.

By 2005, world population had increased to 6.3 billion adding another 900 segments of one million beyond the 1990 total of 5,400. The data indicated that of 6,300 segments of one million, the Adventist Church now had a presence in all but 430 of them. Every day, 11 new congregations are being established somewhere in the world. Every day, somewhere in the world, 2,800 people are joining the Church.

While urban and 10/40 Window mission advances seem considerable, the church has really only just begun. Without question, the early pioneers' struggle to establish a foundation from which to initiate mission was both testing and considerable. However, the Church of 2006 may possibly face the Church's most challenging years.

Rapid growth in the 10/40 Window has forced the Church to look at the interface between members and a population who come from different world-views and religious backgrounds. While the Church's doctrinal message remains biblical, mission methodologies and the logistics of providing language and culture-relevant literature, radio, television, education, nurture, and training

have stretched the Church into unfamiliar territory. Additionally, the Church is challenged to keep alive the interest and vision for mission in the hearts of those whose support is critical—3rd, 4th, and 5th generation Adventists.

As the Adventist Church has advanced into vastly diverse cultures, tribes, and peoples, a wide array of issues have arisen that must be addressed if the Church is to remain a unified world community. The biblical principle of unity is vitally important to the mission of the Church.

The Administrative Committee at the world headquarters established a Global Mission Issues Committee (Issues Committee) to meet each year at the time of the Church's Spring Council. The Issues Committee's immediate task is to prepare an agenda of current mission issues that have potential to advance or disrupt the mission of the Church or challenge world unity. The search for contextualized methods provides a wide array of issues for discussion and resolution.

The agenda of the Issues Committee is often expressed through papers that present the context and history of an issue and that then suggests a rationale and lists values to serve in developing solutions or resolutions. Committee membership includes a wide spectrum of administrators, biblical scholars, and those training frontline workers. The Issues Committee has no constitutional authority.

After the presentation of informative papers and lengthy discussion, representing a wide discipline of experience and academia, a small writing committee is appointed for each issue to express the consensus of the wider committee. The position paper is brought back to the Issues Committee to be discussed. If the majority of the Issues Committee agrees with the position paper, it is recommended to the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) to be studied, edited, and considered for recommendation to the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM). ADCOM takes responsibility for processing the recommendation. Depending on the issue, ADCOM may extend the process to include additional developments and endorsements.

One must ask the hard question, Does the Global Mission Issues Committee help advance the mission of the Church? Or, is the Issues Committee just another theoretical exercise gathered around a few well-crafted words, which issues resolutions and returns home with the misguided impression that those serving on the frontline of mission are immeasurably benefited?

An immediate response to this question must recognize that if the Issues Committee makes any contribution to mission it is only because of the faithful

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work of the Holy Spirit. The Issues Committee is part of a network receiving information and providing information. It is a critical part of the mission information system.

As methods, theology, resources, policy, or structure advance or restrict mission, all levels of the Church structure and their officially recognized committees may submit items to be considered for the agenda of the Issues Committee. The Issues Committee provides a forum to discuss worldwide opinions on mission issues.

The opinion of the Issues Committee does not represent the position of the Adventist Church. However, the Issues Committee, as an official committee of the Church, has the authority to recommend an opinion to committees whose terms of reference provide the power to act. Because this forum exists to discuss mission issues and recommend opinions it helps focus the mission and protect the unity of the world church.

As recommendations are endorsed by committees with power to act, a consensus is built that can guide administrators and educators in advancing mission. A healthy mission culture, guided by understood parameters, serves the long term mission of the Adventist Church.

It is only fair to say that all meaningful mission issues come as a result of the Church being involved in mission. Issues that signal opportunities to be more effective and efficient emerge from the toil and sacrifice of believers wrestling to advance God's cause. The Global Mission Issues Committee processes issues; it does not create issues.

While the papers that follow will provide examples of how the work of the Issues Committee has been used, one example might be helpful.

Global Mission pioneers are lay missionaries that plant churches in unentered areas of their home countries. Thousands of pioneers work in areas where the vast majority of the population lives in fear of evil spirits. When most of these sons or daughters of God begin to catch a glimpse of freedom in Christ they immediately ask, What can your Jesus do about the evil spirits that control our lives? Other questions about the Sabbath, the second coming, the state of the dead, etc., are usually not foremost in their minds.

Most answers from church workers are good biblical answers. However, some have advised the seeker to be careful not to anger the spirits. Accommodating evil spirits is not part of Adventist theology. Why was such an answer given? What was the problem?

While Seventh-day Adventists have a theology on evil spirits and God's supreme power over them, this theology was assumed but never stated in the Church's Fundamental Beliefs. When it became apparent that most people in the 10/40 Window, home to 70 percent of the world's population, live in fear of evil spirits, it also became imperative that the Church provide a statement that correctly states the Church's theology, guides frontline workers, and assures seekers of God's victory and power over evil.

The issue came to the Church because the Church is involved in mission. The Issues Committee represented just one step in a process that eventually brought the Adventist Church to vote a new Fundamental Belief. Frontline workers now have a statement that guides them in providing assurance in Christ to those who would otherwise live in fear.

We pray that these papers will benefit the larger Adventist Church as it responds to Christ's command to teach all nations. Until Jesus comes, the Church will always seek better ways to go about God's business. If it is to successfully serve the Church, the Global Mission Issues Committee must continue to see itself as an instrument of God's will and his eternal plan for people.

Silver Spring, MD, March 1, 2006

Chapter 1

* * *

MISSION OUTREACH AND BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

WILLIAM RICHARDSON

January 13-14, 1998

Introduction: The Religions of the World

Humans are incurably religious. Wherever there are people, there too is religion. It is not always in an easily identifiable form like a denomination or a people group, but humans everywhere reach out to some great unknown. Over the centuries literally hundreds of religious groups have developed, often so influenced by the local culture that the line between religion and culture can hardly be drawn. Many religious systems have lived and died within the relatively short span of recorded history. But most definable religions today can be grouped into four categories: basic or primitive religions, religions originating in India, religions originating in China and Japan, and religions originating in the Middle East (Hopfe 1991:13, 14).

Basic or primitive religion generally refers to the religion of people in undeveloped areas of the world about whom we know little. There is great variety here. Their beliefs may include an animistic view of nature and a kind of polytheism. Native Americans and many groups of Africans are believed to hold such views. The religions originating in India include Hinduism, Jainism, Bud-

dhism, and Sikhism and include the theories that there are many gods and that a person may lead many lives through a system of reincarnation. The ultimate concern of these religions is release from the cycle of life, death, and rebirth and the achievement of non-life, which is called *moksha* (14). Sometimes this goal is achieved through the aid of the gods, but often believers are expected, by their actions or lack thereof, to work out their own release.

The religions originating in China and Japan include Taoism, Confucianism, and Shintoism. These religions share the belief in many gods and include the worship of nature, veneration of ancestors, sometimes a deep reverence for the nation itself, and are quite tolerant, allowing their adherents the freedom to accept and even adopt the religious positions of others (Hopfe 1991:14).

The religions originating in the Middle East include Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Baha'i. All these believe in one supreme creator God. In contrast with the Indian religions, they believe that each person lives only one life on this earth; they regard the material universe positively, hold a linear view of time, and believe in divine judgment of the world. Of these groups, Christianity is by far the largest, with numbers estimated to be climbing toward two billion (Hopfe 1991:340).

The Source of Each Religion's Authority

But what is the source of authority behind these various religions? One theory is that religion developed because humans were weak and fearful of the forces of nature. Since they were at the mercy of those forces, religion provided a system of thought about gods and spirits that could explain some of the mysteries of the universe. Of course, humans then had to figure out how to placate and appease those forces and those gods and thereby survive. The driving force or authority behind such a system of thought would be the superstition that created the fear of the gods in the first place, and then the manmade rules that grow out of that superstitious fear.

But there have been other suggestions. In the nineteenth century the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) in his books *The Essence of Religions* and *The Essence of Christianity* articulated the view that religion was merely a projection of the wishes and needs of humanity (Hopfe 1991:12). He said since people see themselves as weak and helpless, they seek to overcome their problems by imagining and creating a god of power who can come to their aid. Thus humanity is not created in the image of God; god is created in

the image of an idealized human. So religion is really just a form of wishing. People seek in a heaven what they cannot obtain on this earth. As people become more knowledgeable and powerful, religion withers away and is replaced by technology and politics. Incidentally, Feurbach's younger contemporary, Karl Marx, was deeply influenced by him.

Of course the more traditional view of most religionists is that there is a supreme God who, in some way, has revealed himself and his expectations to humans. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, this revelation from God has come by means of oral and written communication, usually through a prophet or prophets. For Judaism, the present form is the Old Testament and the many Talmudic and Mishnaic interpretations. For Christianity the revelation took the form of both Old and New Testaments. In fact it is important for us to keep in mind that the Christian church and the Bible are inseparable. Even the apostolic church which had no New Testament had the Jewish Scriptures. There simply "never was a time when the church existed without the Bible or when the church did not acknowledge the authority of the Bible" (Richardson 1962:248).

Islamic teaching is based on a series of revelations that came to Muhammad at frequent intervals over a period of twenty-three years of his life, purportedly from the angel Gabriel (Haneef 1982:18). In Muhammad's role as spokesman for God, he viewed himself as the last and greatest of the prophets, even transcending such luminaries as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. His adherents accept this conclusion, hence the authority and permanence of his work is assured.

Buddhism presents still other kinds of revelation. Here the messages were revised, interpreted, and given articulation as much by later followers as by Buddha himself (Hopfe 1991:159). One result of the Buddhist diversity of revelation is an openness that allows great diversity of belief among its members. Hence the concept of authority is more diffused.

Biblical Inspiration

The Bible has always been the final authority for Christians, but scholars have debated the meaning and precise weight of that authority, even though that debate has occurred mostly in recent years. For the first eighteen hundred years of Christian history, biblical authority was largely unchallenged and was widely assumed to be inviolable. But the nineteenth century saw the birth and development of a much more critical and "scientific" approach to biblical in-

terpretation that became known as the historical-critical method. While that method was largely rejected by conservative churches and seminaries like our own, a certain amount of debate about the precise nature of biblical interpretation continues. In the past, ideas have ranged from the dictation and verbal theories of inspiration on the far right to a high-critical view of individualism on the left. In our church there is still some debate near the center of that spectrum, with disagreements over the meaning of inerrancy. Although in Adventism I am convinced, having observed and analyzed the arguing for some time, that it is more like a cat fight in which there is considerably more noise than substance to the fight. But more on that issue a bit later.

Historically, Christians have believed that since the written record came from God, its preservation and transmission has been protected from loss and corruption by means of the phenomenon called “inspiration,” and here we must add that “the issue of inspiration is fundamental to the question of the nature and authority of the Bible” (Hasel 1980:248). This issue of inspiration is simply part of the process of understanding how the will of God can be accurately transmitted through certain human beings to other human beings. As mentioned earlier, for historic Christianity the answer is easy—the Bible and the Bible only is our inspired rule of faith and practice. This, of course, assumes that the Bible is, in a general way, God’s voice. But since there are those who do not accept our view of biblical inspiration, is it enough to hold to our position as long as we admit that it is a faith statement and then assume that as others come to our level of faith, they will accept our position? Or is it more reasonable to look for supporting logic and evidences to undergird our faith in the Bible as inspired of God?

Throughout Christian history, the latter path has been the one most consistently followed, even though attempting to identify empirical evidence for inspiration is fraught with difficulties. For example, as mentioned earlier, when certain nineteenth-century Christian scholars looked behind the issue of inspiration and biblical authority, they concluded that the supernatural events in Scripture were beyond proof, were supported only by presuppositions of faith, and were thus suspect as history. So they studied and evaluated Scripture with the same analytical and critical discipline as one might use of any literature that evolved in that era. Thus miracles and the creation story came to be known as myths and so had to be demythologized before their deeper message could be grasped. In reaction to this critical liberalism, conservative believers attempted to articulate a view of plenary inspiration that said that every aspect

of Scripture was not only equally inspired, but was also inerrant in its original autographs. No writers of Scripture could or would make a mistake of any kind since their very words were under the complete control of God. Any apparent discrepancies or errors of concepts were explained as due to insufficient knowledge on our part or mistakes by copyists. Any lesser view of inspiration was seen as stepping onto a slippery slope that would inevitably lead to complete uncertainty about all biblical authority. In other words, uncertainty anywhere would mean uncertainty everywhere. As mentioned above, it is this issue that animates considerable discussion in Adventism today.

While a full discussion of the Adventist debate goes beyond the purview of this paper, we must attempt to clarify some aspects of inspiration and biblical authority to make certain that we are singing on the same page. In the recent past the Adventist debate has heated up, due in part to the publication of two books on the subject that set out opposing views (Thompson 1991 and Koranteng-Pipim 1996). While both books have had a certain polarizing effect, the more recent one has been more severe in this respect, since the author puts all Adventists in one of two camps. Readers are pushed toward the conclusion that if they do not accept the author's view of verbal inerrancy, it is because they are liberals who accept higher-critical methodology, deny the authority of Scripture, and thus are a danger to historic Adventism (Koranteng-Pipim 1996:60, 61). But "the world of understanding the Bible, like most worlds, is more diverse than that" (Young 1997:50). This recent author makes little room for those who fervently believe the Bible is God's authoritative Word and, at the same time, believe it contains a few minor discrepancies of names and dates.

But we must not allow the current debate to blur the basic truth that the Bible is the authoritative revelation of God's will, and though it was mediated to us by fallible human authors and through fallible human copyists, its authoritative message about sin, salvation, the Sabbath, the Second Coming, et al., comes through uncorrupted. In other words, beneath the lively discussions, for most of us, our points of agreement regarding biblical authority are much more basic and important than our points of disagreement. Consequently, we must pull together and turn our attention outward for the common goal of Christian witness to those who have no Savior even though the differences mentioned above animates considerable discussion in Adventism today.

While this paper will not attempt a complete resolution of this longstanding inspiration debate, readers should know that this author stands firmly between the two extremes of inerrancy on the one hand and historical criticism

on the other. I simply reject the liberal, critical approach with its naturalistic presuppositions, its fear of the miraculous, and suspicions of predictive prophecy. But I cannot leap immediately into the lap of the inerrantists. There are simply some discrepancies in the synoptic gospels and John that do not lend themselves to an easy solution. In addition, if it is so vital that the original autographs be error free, why should the work of copyists be any less important to the error-free process? In other words, the inerrantist view holds that the original authors were directly controlled by God but the later scribes were less so. But this view of inspiration seems based on the notion that unless God has *total* control of the authors, Scripture will have no authority. But to be consistent, that total control should extend to every copyist and translator as well.

Another view that is held by some is that since it was the church and its councils that decided the issues of canonicity and which books were included, then obviously it is the church that has supreme authority over the Scriptures. But such a view "confuses authority with authorization; the church authorized the canon of the Bible but it did not confer its authority upon it. In authorizing a canon of scripture, the church recognized an authority which it did not create" (Richardson 1962:250). This principle is born out in the fact that after the canon was authorized, the church then felt constrained to submit every question of faith and morals to the test of Scripture, since it held the final authority, even over the church.

It is helpful to keep in mind a distinction between "inspired truths" and "human words." In ways that defy complete understanding, it is apparently possible for fallible human words to articulate inspired, even infallible divine truths. That distinction between the human and the divine is clearly made in the following statement (emphasis mine).

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all "given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language (White 1950:v).

Of course, when Christians tell non-Christians that the Bible is God's inspired Word, it is important to try to remember how they will interpret that statement. For example, Muslims also believe in the written Word of God, only

theirs is the Qur'an. Furthermore, their Word of God came verbatim from Gabriel to an illiterate Muhammad who wrote it down word for word exactly in the form it has to this day. It has been preserved in the original Arabic and has experienced virtually no revisions or even any significant interpretation (Haneef 1982:18). Even translating it out of the original Arabic is done with great reticence and has been viewed by many conservative Muslims as having a corrupting influence on the text.

In contrast, Christians of all varieties, including inerrantists, believe their inspired Word of God came through a much more convoluted process. First, it was written by many men from all walks of life who lived in many differing circumstances. Few of the writers knew any of the other writers; neither were they members of a select group who had the task of composing a large collection of inspired books. In addition, those many books have come down to us by means of hundreds of manuscripts and scraps of manuscripts of very uneven style and quality. Furthermore, Christian scholars continue to compare and collate manuscripts in the attempt to form the most accurate text possible. All of which must be viewed with considerable wonderment by Muslims as they compare this rather messy compilation of literary witnesses with their one text by one man in one language.

While the task of presenting our Bible with some sense of unity and authority is not a simple one, it is not impossible either. There is a positive, even authoritative aspect in how our Bible came together. For example, God's presumed dictation of the Qur'an through Gabriel to Muhammad could certainly be viewed as miraculous. But to confront one hundred different men from many varied backgrounds over a period of fifteen centuries and without dictating every word, yet still produce a harmonious story is no less miraculous. In fact, some might well view this phenomenon as the greater miracle.

Christ, the Authority of Scripture

The most adequate answer to the question of biblical authority lies in Jesus Christ himself. The biblical account of Israel's history with its Messianic message that culminated in the coming of Christ to earth is truly unique. No other historical development is a parallel to what the Bible portrays about the centuries that led up to and followed the Christ story in the New Testament. The dying and rising gods of Greek mythology may sound similar to the Christian message, but in none of those stories was there a vicarious, prevenient grace

aspect. The whole idea of a triune God creating the race, revealing himself, warning about disobedience, and then intervening by means of his own death sentence cannot be compared with any of the non-Christian religions. "The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of *karma*, the Jewish covenant, and Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional" (Yancey 1997:45).

Furthermore, it is this uniqueness of story that impinges directly on the authority of the story book. Put very simply, "the Scriptures have no authority apart from Christ" (Richardson 1962:250). Many parallels can be found in non-Christian writings that mirror the Bible's poetry, its morals, and even a certain amount of its God concepts. But its Christ story sets it totally apart. Furthermore, its outrageous claims about Christ underscore this point. If Christ was just a good man or even a religious genius, then the Bible is a very interesting book, but basically just another history book. But if, as the New Testament claims, he pre-existed with God (John 1:1), was equal with God (Phil 2:6; Col 1:19), and created the world (Heb 1:2), then the accounts about him transcend the simply historical. Consequently, any conclusion we reach about the authority of the Bible is inextricably linked with the authenticity of Christ as Lord. To put it another way, the uniqueness of Christ as Lord and the authority of the Bible stand or fall together.

In addition there is a close parallel between the complex nature of the God-man and the complex nature of the inspired writings that tell about him. The fourth ecumenical council held at Chalcedon in 451 A.D. concluded that in his incarnation, Jesus had two natures, the human and the divine and neither was lost nor diminished in any way (Boer 1977:43). In a similar way the Bible has its human and divine aspects. "The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' John 1:14" (White 1950:vi).

The Bible was written by real humans and went through all the processes of human literature. It was not a docetic book that only appeared to be human. It was written by truly human fallible people. At the same time it stands as a judge and illuminator of all other books. Just how the deep things of God can be couched in human terms yet not distort will remain mysterious, enigmatic.

But surely the weightiest of divine truths could never be understood apart from everyday human form and expression. "The humanity of Christ and the humanity of Scripture both hide and reveal the divine reality that found embodiment in the creaturely form" (Boer 1977:47).

Clearly both Old and New Testament writers are preoccupied with telling his story. The Old Testament prophets wrote largely in anticipation of what the history of Israel was pointing to, while the New Testament writers are convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16). To put it another way, faith in Christ as Savior and Lord implies that the Bible stands alone in its position of authority, for its primary message is to witness to and about him. The high biblical standards of morality and the behavior it teaches, which can be compared favorably with some non-Christian writings, is quite secondary. In other words it is pointless to draw up a list of similarities between the biblical teachings of morality and those in the writings for other great non-Christian religions for *the purpose of authenticating the latter*. There is simply too great a vacuum in the other writings at the crucial point of sin and salvation. As we will later show, for purposes of kindness, compassion, and gentleness, there is value in acknowledging areas of common ground between Christianity and other religions. In fact such an approach should be a given in all our outreach endeavors. But it is the uncommon ground of the deity of Christ that makes the Bible both authoritative and hard for non-Christians to accept. "The purpose of Scripture is identical with the purpose of revelation itself: to witness to Jesus as the Christ (2 Tim 3:15). It is not an almanac of sundry information, nor a book of historical curiosities. It is at heart Christocentric. He is the hub of its message, and the fulfillment of its hope (Acts 17:2, 3; 28:23)" (Pinnock 1971:36). The primary problem of the human race is the sin problem. So the writers are not just teaching superior ethics, they are bearing witness to the only person who can solve the sin problem. As Pinnock puts it, "Because Scripture is Christological, it is soteriological. It belongs to the divine plan for redeeming sinners" (36). This constant monaural theme of the redemption from sin of the lost race is simply not well articulated in any other religious writing. From beginning ("In the day you eat of it you shall die" Gen 2:17) to end, ("I saw a new heaven and a new earth" Rev 21:1), the Bible hammers home this one idea that sin doomed everyone to death, but God has worked out a solution and that solution is presented in Christ.

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This is why the canon of the NT closes about the end of the first century A.D., there is no more historical witness to be had, for those who had been in touch with the original eyewitnesses were now almost all passed from the scene. It is not a question of the “progressive revelation” of ideas about God, but of the testimony of eyewitnesses to the unique and saving act of God in history, the Christ event, which is the Bible as a whole (Richardson 1962:251).

The Necessary Role of the Spirit

Still the correct perception of that biblical message must be helped along to our dulled minds by the same God whose story it is. Scripture is made up of fallible human words that are historically and culturally conditioned. But with the aid of God’s Spirit, helping the authors and also helping the readers, those words tell the most profound story of God’s loving intervention in the human disaster. We dare not overlook that God-mediated step of the Holy Spirit. “The fact that God has revealed His will to men through His Word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Savior, to open the Word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings” (White 1950:vii).

Just as it could only be God who could take a poor slave tribe and fashion it into an instrument for his saving purpose, so also did he have to guide the halting expressions of numerous writings and make of them a harmonious testimony to his own saving acts. Accordingly, the authority of the Bible will likewise be perceived accurately only by those to whom the Spirit of God brings conviction. “The authority of the Scriptures needs no testimony from man, because it rests on the testimony of the Holy Spirit Himself, confirming His truth without by the creation of an echoing truth within” (Robinson 1935:122, 123). Although it may seem like rather circular reasoning, the Holy Spirit can only bring that conviction of authority as the written word is read.

The Christian, the Bible, and Outreach

As the Christian considers the issue of mission or outreach, there are additional aspects of biblical authority that come into focus. First, Christians consider the Bible not simply as a tool of mission but as the basis of mission—the very reason for that mission. The Bible writers were gripped, not only by the Christ event, but by the conviction that it was the unique message that must go to the ends of the earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them” (Matt 28:19). Other religions may have an evangelistic zeal

about the importance of their beliefs and behavior, but only Christianity puts so much emphasis on the resolution of the devastating problem of sin. Furthermore, that problem cannot be solved by several solutions. Christ alone is the source of salvation ("there is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved" Acts 4:12), and apart from him, all is lost for all humans and for all eternity. Other religions teach how humans can achieve personal peace and fulfillment. They teach how to live peaceably with others and how to please God by appropriate behavior. They teach how to escape the endless drudgery of reincarnations, but Christianity teaches that human history had a beautiful beginning, but developed a fatal sin problem. It goes on to present, not only the awful consequences of that sin problem, but also the complete solution to that problem in the Christ event and the final eradication of the problem. Thus, its message is comprehensive and unique. Consequently, Christians do not believe that their message is simply one among several or even the best of the various options in the religious marketplace. Christianity is "a way of life rooted in and organized around a genuine experience of ultimate reality mediated by the crucified and raised Messiah, Jesus" (Johnson 1996:57). To view Christianity as simply another world religion arising out of its own cultural milieu is a most serious distortion. For Christians, it is a do or die mentality. While for reasons of diplomacy some may agree to work within certain territorial limits, such restrictions will always be difficult for most Christians to accept. Their religion can never be likened to the best medicine among several good ones. It is more like the only anti-venom available that will save the life of the victim. Others may provide a temporary palliative, but the patient will finally die anyway. Only Christianity offers a real, life-giving solution.

In addition, Adventist Christians add to that the conviction that they must help prepare a lethargic world for the second advent of Jesus. While we are not alone in this conviction, we feel burdened with a specificity of detail about eschatology that we feel absolutely constrained to share. This part of our message may not have the weight of the first advent message, but it is surely just as universal in its thrust. Consequently, territorial boundaries are anomalies that do not fit easily into the Adventist lexicon.

Such conviction about the messages in Scripture has its impact on the unique authority of Scripture as well. In other words, the validity of other religious writings will be determined, not by whether or not their ethics concur with Scripture, but by whether or not they affirm the life and message of Jesus'

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first and Second Advent. Needless to say, that will leave most all non-Christian writings rather barren in the eyes of Adventist Christians.

Of course it is important in our outreach to various people groups that over and above the issue of scriptural authority we remind ourselves of the well-established fact that, first and foremost, it is friendship and warmth that win people to our faith, not unbeatable argumentation and superior doctrine. This is especially important when the audience is a group that seems to be more distant from us than groups we are familiar with. Obviously we feel most comfortable approaching people with backgrounds like our own. But here the non-Christian religions pose special challenges and some more than others. For example, thanks in part to increased Asian immigration and endorsement by celebrities like actor Richard Gere and Chicago Bulls coach, Phil Jackson, Buddhism has grown rapidly in the United States. But because its philosophy is so different from the Judeo-Christian worldview, few American Christians have taken on the challenge of witnessing to Buddhists, either here or overseas. The Buddhist ideas of reincarnation and the desire to seek release from the wearisome cycle of birth and rebirth makes Buddhist doctrines seem strange and distant from us. Similarly, what we know about the Muslim philosophy and theology is aggravated by the selective processes of the media which thrive on the spectacular and the negative. Accordingly, our notions of Islam are quite distorted, with the result that we put great distance between us and them. But fundamental to any strategic plan for evangelizing them is loving and praying for them. "We must see our fellow travelers on planet Earth as our Lord Jesus Christ sees them . . . made in the image of God" (Guthrie 1994:73). In a recent *Review* article, Reg Brown, a retired pastor/evangelist from Australia, pointed out that Jesus' approach was to *socialize* and *sympathize* with people first. Then, after he had *ministered to their practical needs* of healing and comforting, he invited them to follow him. But, as Pastor Brown asserts, "Too often we ask people to take the fourth step—to follow Jesus—before we have built bridges into their lives through the first three" (Brown 1997:16). Of course, we bring this point even closer home when we confront and acknowledge our historic diffidence toward Catholics.

At the same time, there is biblical precedent for approaching non-Christian people groups not only with compassion for the persons but with respect for their writings. Paul, the first Christian with a global mission mentality, set the stage for approaching people who are at some distance from our theology and background. In his approach to the Athenian philosophers, Paul not only

demonstrated some deference to their practiced religion ("I perceive that in every way you are very religious" Acts 17:22), he went so far as to use their own writings to help create some common ground. I think it is quite significant that, at an impassioned moment in his apparently extemporaneous speech on the Arepagus, he chose to include a couple of references from their own poets ("As even some of your own poets have said" Acts 17:28). True, he put a bit of a contextual spin on them, clearly implying more than the original poets had in mind. Nevertheless, the fact that he was not only familiar with their writings, but used them to ease his way into their thought processes should be instructive to us and should come as no surprise. After all, it was part of what shaped evangelistic methods. "To the Jews I became as a Jew . . . to those outside the law I became as one outside the law . . . to the weak I became weak. . . . I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:20-22). Clearly Paul saw the necessity of adaptability and accommodation, of reaching out to people in more than just physical and geographical ways. Such an approach demands serious thought by Christians doing similar outreach today.

Adventists have for many years through the Institute of World Mission acknowledged the importance of meeting people on their ground, in their culture, in their language, and to a large degree, on their terms. "The church is not to carry the stigma of being an alien body, drawing men away from their natural social and political institutions" (Phillips 1948:129). But important cautions should leaven our proclivity to meet people on their own ground. First, we must rigorously discipline our tendency to be condescending in our manner and methods. Since we approach people with the conviction that our message is an absolute must for all, it is a natural thing for us to assume a certain air of superiority. It is not that we would arrogantly and overtly treat other groups as inferior, but rather that our certainty about our remnant status might cause us to unconsciously give the impression that since we are doing them this incredible favor, they should demonstrate their appreciation by ready acceptance of our various admonitions and instructions.

Of course if we pause to think about how non-Christian groups, especially conservative Muslims, view us, it will provide a certain check on our temptation toward glibness and superiority. In their eyes, Adventists are not the unique embodiment of Christianity. We are one small segment of a very large group of people who have a religious name but at the same time get drunk and enjoy and are entertained by people of very low moral behavior. With such

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presuppositions on their part, it is difficult to convince them, especially the devout ones, that they must give up their belief system and adopt ours. When we remember this, surely all our attitudes of condescension are inappropriate and perfidious.

A second caution we must consider is the need to carefully distinguish between accommodation and compromise. This, of course, touches the nerve center of the whole issue. In our drive to reach people where they are, how do we make certain that we preserve those aspects of the gospel message that we consider truly unique and non-negotiable? Such a question assumes that we have identified and agreed upon what is truly global and non-negotiable in our biblical message and what is cultural and subject to accommodation. Since Paul apparently faced this very issue, it would be helpful if we could turn to some passage and find there his concise list of "testing truths" about which he would brook no compromise. But our problem cannot be resolved so simply, for he left us no such list. Consequently, after coming to some agreement about the authority of Scripture, we have to decide just how rigidly we should present our twenty-seven statements of fundamental beliefs.

In this regard, Adventist Christianity approaches some of the Indian religions at a distinct disadvantage. With their eclectic approach they are quite open to allowing adherents to include various of their own ideas in their broad landscape of beliefs. However, as they talk with us, they rightfully detect a very narrow attitude on our part that will allow no changes or additions to our twenty-seven propositional statements. But if the apostle Paul is our hero of global mission, we should follow his lead and make every effort to determine early on where there are areas of common ground between us and our target audience and use them unapologetically. And the operative word is "use" them. As mentioned above, in Paul's approach any accommodating on his part was clearly a means to a very well-defined end—"I have become all things to all men *that I might by all means save some*" (1 Cor 9:22, emphasis mine). That ultimate goal of saving some at least gives us a start on the non-negotiables, for we must, like Paul, keep the crucified and resurrected Christ at the center of all else. But we may be able to use several different approach roads before we arrive at that destination.

Referring again to Paul's work with the Athenians, we must clarify the aftermath of that episode. Some have felt that Paul went too far in his accommodating to the Athenians and that he later regretted his calculated attempt to meet them on their own ground. The idea is held largely because of a brief

paragraph in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Describing Paul's reflection on his work in Athens, Ellen White observes that there "he had met logic with logic, science with science, philosophy with philosophy. As he thought of the time thus spent, and realized that his teaching in Athens had been productive of but little fruit, he decided to follow another plan of labor in Corinth, in his efforts to arrest the attention of the careless and the indifferent" (1911a:244). But the reason his Athenian work had been "productive of but little fruit" was not because he had been overly accommodating or compromising. In the preceding chapter Ellen White makes it clear that the reason Paul had difficulties with the Athenians was because of their "pride of intellect and human wisdom" (1911a:240). In fact she goes on to speak well of his somewhat oblique approach in that setting.

Paul's words contain a treasure of knowledge for the church. He was in a position where he might easily have said that which would have irritated his proud listeners, and brought himself into difficulty. Had his oration been a direct attack upon their gods and the great men of the city, he would have been in danger of meeting the fate of Socrates. But with a tact born of divine love, he carefully drew their minds away from heathen deities, by revealing to them the true God, who was to them unknown (White 1911a:241).

Furthermore, another reason he changed his approach in Corinth was because he had a very different audience. In Ellen White's words the Corinthians were "careless and indifferent," which would hardly describe the intelligencia on Athens' Areopagus. For the philosophers he clearly felt that an oblique approach to the resurrected Christ was necessary. For the happy-go-lucky and licentious Corinthians, a more direct route to "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2), would be much more effective than the somewhat philosophical approach used in Athens.

In neither case was his method flawed and thus later rejected. His approach in Athens, while seeming at first to be tentative did not at all avoid or in any sense dilute the "testing truth" of the resurrection. As mentioned above, the common ground he used was Athenian poetry. But in the overall approach to them he does not linger all that long on the common ground. Just two verses after his last quote of their poet, he refers to their pagan practices as the "times of ignorance" which God was willing to overlook. But he immediately cautions them that now everything has changed and he expects them to repent. For a group of philosophers who "spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21), Paul had a lot of courage to ask them to

repent in his very first Bible study. Not only that, but he quickly forged ahead into something similar to our “mark of the beast” sermon in that same first study. He pressed it home with some urgency by confronting them with the idea that a judgment day was coming. And the “proof” of the judgment lay in Christ’s resurrection from the dead. In Paul’s work there is hardly an example of over-accommodation to local beliefs and practices that he later regretted. Rather, it is a very instructive example of starting on their turf but then moving rather quickly to issues at the heart of Christianity that were known to be foreign to their thinking and difficult for them to accept. Keep in mind, in those early days, the resurrection of Jesus was surely the Achilles heel of evangelistic preaching. Did he know that that would be as far as he could go with them and that most of his hearers would look with some amusement and total disbelief on this novel idea? Perhaps. Should we follow his lead? I think so.

But back to the question of the common and uncommon ground. As we have mentioned there is not much wiggle room in our twenty-seven fundamental beliefs in the sense of adjusting them to fit into regional religions and cultures. But if Paul and the apostolic church is our model, we can and must seek creative ways to make approaches while keeping the content of our message intact. After Paul became “all things to all people,” his final goal was to “save some.” Since saving them could only happen when they heard and accepted the testing truth of “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2), it is obvious that Paul’s accommodation was only at the beginning and was really quite utilitarian. But as we have seen, even with his calculated approach, Paul’s results were mixed. In Athens, the very place where his attempts at accommodation are described with the greatest detail, the number “saved” was rather small (Acts 17:34). It should be remembered that at this time in his ministry, it was not uncommon for Paul to be run out of town after only a very short campaign, so his evangelistic count, I think, was often quite low. Still, as we approach the Eastern and Middle Eastern religions, we must be wise and utilitarian in approaches if we are to be effective in our witness. Paul and the Athenians must continue to be the painful paradigm that instructs us. Surely we must always seek the common ground, but at the same time keep in mind that it is only a very temporary resting place. Paul spent little time there. It seems his real concern was to move his hearers rather quickly to the not so crucial issue of the resurrection. Not surprisingly, the attrition rate was high.

With our non-Christian friends, we can enjoy and even press home our common ground of similar life styles and devotion to God. However, if our

ultimate goal is to woo them into the Adventist fold, the common ground will take us only a little way toward that goal. For Paul, the Rubicon was the resurrection. For us, it is the cruciality of Christ and the authority of our Scriptures. They are virtually one and the same.

And at the heart of “being effective in our witness” is convincing non-Christians that the final authority in all this is our Bible. And about this we can brook no compromise. We may take considerable time with them in their “Scriptures” as a legitimate application of being “all things to all people.” But in time, we must keep in mind that the story of Jesus and the final authority of the Bible are inseparable. It is simply not enough to say that other religious written works are inspired or prophetic. We have to help others see that down through time God has worked through all kinds of people and events to make himself and his message understood. To many people he gave understanding of some small detail. But few of God’s human agents or prophets could grasp the entire picture or present the whole body of knowledge about God and his plan for saving the lost race. Often their partial knowledge was a necessary, even inspired piece of the larger puzzle. Speaking of the messianic anticipation prior to Christ’s first coming, Ellen White clearly articulates this idea. “Outside the Jewish nation there were men who foretold the appearance of a divine instructor. These men were seeking for truth, and to them the Spirit of Inspiration was imparted. One after another, like stars in the darkened heavens, such teachers had arisen. Their words of prophecy had kindled hope in the hearts of thousands of the Gentile world” (White 1911b:33).

It may surprise some that Ellen White uses such terms as “Spirit of Inspiration” and “prophecy” for persons who wrote no portion of Scripture. But it fits with this idea that in a world of vastly different people groups, God has to be utilitarian too. After all, it was his idea to fling them in all directions. “Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the languages of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (Gen 11:9). The resultant diversity of languages and cultures now presents us with our greatest opportunity and our greatest challenge. Building bridges is never easy. When Jesus’ own disciples were suddenly confronted with a “foreign” people group who treated them badly, they reacted with surprisingly little tolerance; “Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54). But such sentiment was directly antithetical to the mission and message of Jesus. His words made it abundantly clear that although there were sheep “not of this fold,” they were to be viewed

as candidates for the kingdom; "I must bring them also" (John 10:16). But the hostility of the apostles toward people who were "different" shows that the divisions begun at Babel have always been difficult to bridge. Little has changed with the passage of time.

Difficulties in Bridge Building

For years we have sought to find common ground in our evangelistic approaches to people whose belief systems differed from our own. In some areas such as healthful living we have much to build on. However, with groups such as Muslims, our strong stand on the authority of the Bible remains a point of no small contention. As mentioned above, while there is some internal squabbling about the precise meaning of inspiration, there is broad agreement that our entire belief system is founded on the Bible and converts must come to accept that idea. This is truly a non-negotiable article of faith for Adventist Christians.

At the same time we must be aware that to others we appear as purveyors of double-speak when we go on to add Ellen White as another authority. Our fervid assertions that she is not a second Bible but only a kind of commentary on the Bible often fails to really clarify or convince. Surely this step in our instruction must be presented late if we are to follow Paul's calculated style of being "all things to all people," in his approach stages.

In addition to keeping in mind how our position is perceived, we must be keenly aware of how other groups view their "Scriptures." Muslims in particular hold the Qur'an in such esteem that for us to treat it lightly would doom any further efforts on our part. For example, Muslims make a strong point of the fact that of all the various "Bibles" of religious groups, only the Qur'an has been preserved in its exact original form. In contrast, Muslims assert, segments of the Torah, the Psalms, and even the Gospels "are so heavily intermixed with human additions and alterations that it is very difficult to determine what part of them constitutes the original Message (as many Biblical scholars admit only too readily), much less to guide one's life by them" (Haneef 1982:18). In addition Muslims believe it is a mark of authenticity that the Qur'an has been preserved in its precise Arabic wording in the exact order in which it was received. In fact, when cited in public it is always to be read in the original Arabic. As mentioned above, it is only with a certain condescension that Muslims make allowance for translation into other languages, a practice that comes from their strong belief in the verbal inspiration of the Qur'an. Muslims recognize two

levels of inspiration, *external*, by which the word of God came from Gabriel to Muhammad, and *internal*, which guides the thought and reasoning of the Prophet (Oster 1975:75).

There is some common ground since this view equates somewhat with the Christian terms of *revelation*, which describes how God confronts the prophet, and *inspiration*, by which the prophet is empowered to accurately transmit the divine message. But, unfortunately, that which divides us in this matter of scriptural authority is greater than that which unites us. Muslims go on to speak of the authority of the Hadith or “authentic tradition” that has been passed on regarding Muhammad’s handling of all kinds of issues. How he related to commonplace decisions, “how he combed his hair, his likes and dislikes—all became important patterns of life for the faithful Muslim. To imitate the Prophet was the highest goal piety could aim at” (Goldzehir 1917:3, 22). Thus in Muslim thought, Muhammad nearly reached the level of divinity, so that disrespect shown him has given rise to the charge of blasphemy and has even resulted in the death penalty. Many have viewed him as sinless and some have even suggested that light emanated from the prophet. “It is told that the Prophet did not cast any shadow, for he was filled with light and ‘your cheek is the *Surat an-Nur*’ (light), sang an eighteenth-century Indian mystic” (Carmody and Carmody 1988:82). Thus, the way of life of Muhammad became the way of life of Islam. The accurate transmission of all these details forms the Hadith and this process shifted the emphasis from the revelation of the *Book* to revelations about the *person* of Muhammad. As Oster puts it, “Part of the difficulty in evangelizing Muslims lies in their great dependence on and belief in the Traditions that have far exceeded the Koran in quantity and almost in importance” (1975:77).

It is a difficult chasm to cross. Not only must we deal with the vastly different content in the two “divine” sources, the Bible and the Qur’an, but we must also deal with the authoritative traditions that have developed around the person of Muhammad. Of course, we should at least be able to cultivate a sympathetic mindset, as we also have some rather well-defined traditions. For example, what is the source for much of our modern Sabbath-keeping behavior? We have few “direct” words from the Lord about twenty-first century Sabbath-keeping. While our credo is “the Bible and Bible only,” we have many “traditions” that have taken on the weight of “virtual inspiration.” For example, Sabbath outings to the beach may include walking or wading, but not swimming or organized volleyball. Canoeing and bicycling are acceptable, but scuba diving and water skiing are not. Eating out on Sabbath is acceptable if it is on a

necessary trip, but not if the trip is unnecessary or the dining is only for pleasure. The point is that our source of authority regarding various Sabbath behaviors comes across as laced with tradition. Consequently, we should approach other groups that hold strong traditions with gentleness and understanding.

But gentleness and understanding can only take us so far. Considerable distance remains between the concepts of a morally impeccable Muhammad or Buddha and a divine Christ. The Muslim assertion that they actually exalt Christ as a prophet still leaves him incapable of being Lord and Savior of the race. But on this issue we must acknowledge that this starts a debate that is essentially un-winnable in the realm of logic or proof. The intellect is not where this issue can be resolved. And the moment we acknowledge that it is a spiritual puzzle, at that moment we admit that only the Holy Spirit can completely resolve it. And if that is true, then we must be prepared to exercise patience while the Spirit impresses hearts and minds in his way and in his time frame. Paul, who was probably not known for his patience, clearly acknowledged the limits of cool rationality when he reminded the Corinthian believers that preaching was really just so much “foolishness” to many of his hearers. Of course, his example helps us see that we do not give up the battle just because it is un-winnable from the standpoint of logic. Paul’s continuing proclamation illustrates for us that our commission remains unchanged, regardless of the odds. No matter how “foolish” or difficult it may seem, our telling the gospel story is still the method through which God has chosen to appeal to and even save “them that believe” (1 Cor 1:21). As Paul told the Corinthians, he planted and Apollos watered, “but God gave the growth” (1 Cor 3:6).

From this some might conclude that since God’s Spirit is responsible for the outcome, how we go about planting the seed is of little consequence. After all, the sower in Jesus’ parable seemed to throw his seed about pretty carelessly. Of course, a story designed to stress the importance of how we listen should not be turned into one about how we are to plant. Surely it is incumbent upon us to plant our seed as carefully and wisely as possible, acknowledging that how we approach people can affect how they respond. Since God has chosen us to speak for him, I do not think it was his intent that he would always have to do his part in spite of us rather than in cooperation with us. And to continue the sower analogy, while there have always been sowers of weed seed, there have also been a variety of sowers of good seed; hence it is not too strong to admit with Ellen White that even divine messages have come through a variety of instruments. Of course, such an attitude will appear to damn with faint praise,

but that is really all we do. God communicated bits and pieces of his wishes through the pagan Nebuchadnezzar, through the renegade Balaam, and even through the lips of the unprincipled Caiaphas (John 11:51). But Christians feel that the Old and New Testament comprise a larger whole. The Bible, as no other revelation, presents the entire picture from the beginning of evil to its ultimate defeat. As other sources of spiritual instruction such as the Qur'an add some harmonizing details, we may acknowledge and accept them as pieces of the larger puzzle. But in time, Muslims and others must be confronted with the core of Christianity which is Christ. To the degree that their sacred writings do not detract from the Christ story, they can be viewed as instructive. But to the degree that they differ with or are hostile to the Christ story, they must eventually be seen as misleading and wrong. Such writings cannot be presented as alternate paths that will, by themselves, lead to eternal life.

Occasionally extra-biblical writings may bring clarification or may even serve as a corrective to some erroneous belief and behavior. When that happens, Christians believe that the biblical message was not necessarily wrong or needing to be replaced. Rather the correction came because the biblical instruction was not being followed. An example is the Islamic emphasis on the absolute sovereignty and oneness of Allah. When Muhammad came on the scene in the seventh century, Middle-Eastern Christianity was in a sorry state. Disputes over the nature of Christ, the Trinity, Mariolatry, relics, and prayers for the dead had terribly fragmented the religion. It was hardly a good representation of Christ or the God he represented. "The virtual polytheism to which the Byzantine Church had fallen heir made nominal Christianity little better than the pagans of Arabia during the period known by Arab historians as the *Jahiliyah* days, usually rendered "time of ignorance" (Oster 1979:29). Consequently, the vigor with which Muhammad stressed the oneness and sovereignty of Allah can be viewed as a much needed reform, and even an inspired corrective.

"The Qur'anic philosophy or basic outlook, then, pivots on the supremacy of Allah and the divine revelation. In light of this revelation, human beings are but bits of dust or clots of blood. God is all-sovereign, and the prime task and glory of any creature's life is to submit to God in both obedience and reverence" (Carmody 1988:70).

There is little question that the Christian presentation of God as tolerant and almost indifferent to lax behavior would benefit by the awe and reverence fostered by Muhammad's teaching. Was his view of a God of rigor given to Muhammad by divine revelation? Since the biblical prophets all presented mere

pieces of the puzzle and not the entire picture, in that same limited way it is possible to give a tentative yes to that question. But does such a position imply that other teachings by Muhammad bear a divine imprint? Not necessarily. As stated above the biblical writers each give only limited aspects of the entire revelation of God to man. However, they all lead positively to the ultimate revelation which is the *Logos* of God in Christ Jesus. Most of Muhammad's writings do not point positively toward Jesus, and many actually point away from him. Which means, from the Christian perspective, they have authority only in those areas where they affirm and strengthen some aspect of biblical revelation. But even there, the Christian must exercise caution.

The fact is, while Islam's view of Allah is a lofty one that was badly needed in the world and even in Christianity of that era, it also set forth a kind of severity that needed the warmth and relief that the Christian God of love and forgiveness offers. In fact, through so much of the Qur'anic instruction runs a theme of threat and dire consequences to the unresponsive that is both frightening and tiresome. Much of it does not make pleasant or inspiring reading. It is easy to get the feeling that Allah is to be feared, in part, because he is fearsome and scary. "If Allah were to afflict thee, there is none that can remove the affliction but He, and if He were to bestow upon thee some good, He has power to do all that He wills" (*Al-An'Am*, 6:7). And a few lines later, "Who is guilty of greater injustice than one who fabricates a lie against Allah or rejects His Signs as falsehood? Surely the wrongdoers shall not prosper." And again, "Those who deny that they are bound to face Allah are indeed the losers, so much so, that when the Hour shall come on them unawares, they will exclaim: Oh, the bitterness of our remorse at neglecting this Hour! They will be carrying their burdens on their backs; and evil burdens will they be" (*Al-An'Am*, chap. 6, part 7:32-33). Admittedly the Bible likewise speaks of punishment for the impenitent, but it is not the constantly recurring theme that it is in the Qur'an.

While the Muslim stress on the transcendence and utter otherness of God can be welcomed by Christians, there is sharp division on the meaning of monotheism. We Adventist Christians have no trouble marrying the concepts of monotheism and trinity, but Muslims view a triune god as a false god. As a result we must guard against ignorant naiveté when using common Christian terminology for seemingly similar phenomena in non-Christian groups. In other words, to say that both Christians and Muslims are monotheists is objectively true, but quite misleading in its implications. The Qur'an stands strongly against the notion that God had a son, so the Christian doctrine of the divinity

of Christ is anathema to Muslims. Acknowledging this basic difference again forces one to confront the issue of the authority of Scripture.

Conclusion

Although we have said that the various Bible writers each presented only pieces of the puzzle, each piece had divine backing, so the entire work is tied together with a divine thread. Accordingly, if the authority of Scripture extends throughout its entirety, then those passages that speak of Christ being “in the form of God” and even “equal with God” (Phil 2:6) must be accepted as true. In which case, given the Muslim low view of Jesus, when confronting the issue of the authority of the Bible *as a whole* and the authority of the Qur’an *as a whole*, it has to be an either/or situation—it clearly cannot be both/and. As to whether or not bits and pieces of the Qur’an, or other extra-biblical religious source books, could be called “inspired,” the Adventist Christian can only respond, “How does it compare with the Bible?” We simply have no other sieve through which to screen out error. Anyone can say with the false prophets of old, “I have dreamed” (Jer 23:25), and no one can effectively dispute such a personal “experience.” But the biblical canon, which has withstood centuries of intense scrutiny by friends and foe alike, remains the only source of the Christ story and thus the only safe standard by which to judge all other stories. Where other writings agree with and strengthen the truth about God and his message of salvation in Christ, we welcome them. Many approaches and various methods may be used, but there is a non-negotiable center that must eventually be made clear. “Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry . . . out of partisanship, not sincerely. . . . What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed” (Phil 1:15, 17). Whatever assists in that proclamation, we welcome and encourage. Whatever detracts from that proclamation, we must eventually reject.

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Chapter 2

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THE CHURCH, STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION, AND ACCULTURATION

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Object of God's Supreme Regard

There are religionists who today think in terms of a "churchless Christianity." Many encourage an organizationless religion. The idea is that you can worship without going to church—lying on the beach contemplating the blue or starry sky or the waves or just staying in a mountain cabin or simply being at home.

While private, unorganized oblations are fine in their place, they must not be confused with communion in a church communal setting. The Lord's Prayer starts with "Our Father." John Wesley stated that "the gospel of Christ knows no religion but social" (Wesley 1868:xxii).

God loves individuals, but "nothing else in this world is so dear to God as His church," (White 1948:42) and it "is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard" (White 1923:49). Therefore, in discussing the church, we are dealing with something of paramount importance.

Defining the Church

There has been in this century a great deal of study regarding ecclesiology. It is a complicated topic. It was only in 1964, after being in existence for well over a millennium, that the Roman Catholic Church adopted a dogmatic constitution regarding the church. Even at Vatican II the original draft was changed radically before final approval in 1964. It is both interesting and surprising to note that in Catholic history infallible pronouncements regarding the doctrine of the church have been consistently avoided.

Defining the church is complicated by two facts: it is *human*, but it is also *God's* church. Because it is human, it exists in time and looks at current reality. As a human institution it also exists in space. It has human weaknesses. Nevertheless, it is also God's church. Therefore, it exists for eternity and universality and maintains a glorious vision of the final eschatological kingdom where God will be all and in all (1 Cor 15:28).

Matters are further complicated by the primitive organization in the early church. There are not many church structures in the New Testament. However, quite understandably, as the church grew, organization became more formal. The same happened with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some of our early pioneers, as is well known, did not want any church organization.

The People of God

The first century church had both beginnings of presbyterial and congregational aspects, but the episcopal system was absent. The New Testament Church was not a hierarchal structure. It was the *ecclesia*, a society of the faithful "called out" to be the "people of God," a movement with a mission to preach the gospel to the entire world in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ as Lord and King. In short, the church is the assembly of all those who believe in Jesus Christ. Thus, the task is essentially to carry on the work of Jesus Christ through (1) witness (*martyrion*), (2) service (*diakonia*), and (3) fellowship (*koinonia*).

The New Testament concept of church leadership was far removed from any monarchical episcopacy or corporate CEO concept, but was based on spiritual gifts, and certainly not on any imitation of secular, state, or industry models. The unifying forces of the early church were the gifts of the Spirit and the universal priesthood of all believers. These are important concepts in facing the issues of this global mission consultation.

Pragmatic Church Organization

As found in a rudimentary way in the New Testament, the Seventh-day Adventist Church today operates as congregations, as regional groupings of churches, and as a global church. The General Conference is not a church in the congregational sense. However, through delegated representative authority, it is *in effect* the church in all the world. For over three-quarters of a century the Adventist Church has been operating on four organizational constituency levels: church, conference, union, and General Conference (including its divisional sections). I believe that this is, to some extent, a pragmatic arrangement, though the hand of God was clearly involved in our church organization and it had the approval of Ellen G. White.

Anyone looking for the solution to finishing the work by doing away with church organization should not look to Ellen G. White for support. She strongly believed in organization, even in the end of time: "Some have advanced the thought that as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent. . . . We want to hold the lines evenly, that there be no breaking down of the system of organization and order that has been built up by wise, careful labor" (White 1923:489).

What does it take to be part of the church? Jesus himself implies that where two or three (or two or three thousand) are gathered in his name, when he is in the midst of them, there is a church. This is not a hierarchical or juridical concept. Hierarchical and sacramental churches have special problems in facing the issues we are considering. This is not the case of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Seventh-day Adventists need not be dogmatic about church structures. They are important and, in God's providence, have served us well. We are a pragmatic church; we use what works. Experience has shown that our structure has served us effectively, but it is not sacrosanct. It has been tested and proved to be God's own over many decades.

Special Situations Need Special Organization

There are special situations which can only be effectively met by special organizational approaches. This we have done in various ways. Where it has not been feasible to organize churches, we have organized companies. In some areas

of the world we organize districts, with district leaders. In some countries it has been felt that neither a conference nor a union conference fits the bill, and we have organized unions of churches. In other places we have "attached unions" or "attached conferences." Where local churches have not been permitted, we have had house churches. These do not fit into our regular structure, but the system works under the circumstances. Where it has not been possible to send missionaries or regular employed workers, "tentmakers" have been sent. Modified organizational terminology has also been used, such as "field" or "diocese" instead of conference or mission. Other terms for president have been used where this term is not permitted. In places where our churches were closed, the people have met under trees. Where the use of banks, regular accounting, and auditing were not permitted or caused a serious disadvantage for the church, these methods were abandoned. Where the church was banned, underground or secret churches, committees, and cash transactions have been used. Much of this is not in harmony with the organizational policies of the church, but in harmony with pragmatic pursuit of the church's mission.

There are areas in the world where the church can function in a regular organizational way. There are places where in order to function, the organizational structures have to be adapted or changed. Then, there are places where the religious liberty situation is such that the church cannot function in an organized way at all. Where that is not possible, Adventist pragmatism dictates that other approaches should and must be used.

In my view, there are five different possible organizational approaches, depending on the circumstances: (1) ideal church organization, (2) pragmatic church organization, where the ideal is not possible, (3) permitted or experimental organization to test or try out new structural or institutional approaches, (4) underground church organization, where regular church work is not permitted, and (5) no church organization as such.

Organization must be pragmatic and flexible since there are abnormal situations. Where socio-cultural and/or political circumstances make it impossible or inadvisable to operate with regular church structures, we have to work in the best way we can, using *ad hoc* structures in the most effective way. Certainly, under these circumstances desire for power and control should play no role.

Adaptation is both unavoidable and necessary. Translation itself involves a degree of adaptation.

Helpful Theological Concepts

There are several concepts that are or can be helpful to the global mission of the church. First, the biblical concept of *laos*, designating the church as the people of God. This word is mentioned some 140 times in the New Testament. The word *laos* does not represent organizations or institutions as such, but designates the vehicle for God's mission of proclamation and service in the world. *Laos* represents the totality of God's people, including the ordained ministry. It has been a grave mistake to take *laos* and derive from it the concept of laity, thereby dividing the church into groups composed of "laity" and "clergy." To compound the mistake, clergy are often called "workers," implying that the non-ordained do not work for the church.

A second useful concept is of the church as both visible and invisible. The church is invisible in the multitude of devoted and sincere people of all churches and even those belonging to no organized church, who worship God in spirit and in truth to the extent of their knowledge and understanding.

While hearing the Word is important, Paul makes it clear, however, that there can be salvation for those outside the regularly organized church who have not heard the written Word: "When Gentiles who do not possess the law carry out its precepts by the light of nature, then, although they have no law, they are their own law, for they display the effect of the law inscribed on their hearts. Their conscience is called as witness" (Rom 2:14, 15 NEB).

In this connection there are two theological concepts that we might wish to explore and which Catholic theologians use to balance the *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church) teaching: (a) "invincible ignorance" and (b) "desire for the church." The thought is that anyone living in "invincible ignorance" of the Christian faith may be living outside the organizational borders of the church, but still belong to the people of God, and therefore, can be saved. Desire for the church and baptism is a related concept. Genuine desire to do God's will and what is right provides an implicit desire for baptism and church membership, though the individual concerned may not even be aware of this. Thus, a person can be attached to the church though not institutionally a member. Certainly God himself seems to contextualize people when we are told in Ps 87:6: "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there."

Third, it is helpful to note that Seventh-day Adventist Church governance authority moves upward, not downward. This should be kept in mind in start-

ing new work in so called unentered territories. Any authority from above, or from elsewhere, should really be temporary, somewhat like using another car and battery to jump start your car.

In preparing this paper, I was surprised to run across the following statement I wrote thirty-two years ago: "In order to keep its missionary outlook and the dynamic character of a movement, the church must continually keep its ecclesiological definitions and institutions operational and evangelistic, within the framework, of course, of the New Testament concept of *ecclesia*, rather than frozen in narrowly hierarchical and legal forms of church organization, in imitation of political government" (Beach 1968:91).

In keeping things operational, organization may require adaptation. Many aspects of organization are not part of the laws of the Medes and Persians. Music needs to be adapted. Reverence in worship, social habits, and parliamentary procedure all need to be acculturized. Ellen G. White gives us this counsel: "There is to be no change in the general features of our work, . . . we are to enter into no confederacy with the world, supposing that by so doing we could accomplish more. . . . No line of truth that has made the Seventh-day Adventist people what they are is to be weakened. We have the old landmarks of truth, experience, and duty, and we are to stand firmly in defense of our principles, in full view of the world" (White 1948:17).

It is clear to me that she is here speaking about the work of the church in what we might call normal situations. There are situations where you cannot operate "in full view of the world."

Windows of Vulnerability

As church leaders we need to be aware of the dangers of syncretism—the reconciliation or union of conflicting beliefs, especially religious beliefs. There is one faith, one Lord, one baptism. Indeed, there is "none other name to obtain salvation." On the other hand, Paul encourages Christians to be "all things to all men" (1 Cor 9:22). The motivation is "that I might by all means save some." Paul became a Jew for the sake of the Jews, and without law to those without law (1 Cor 9:20, 21). While there is such a thing as organizational apostasy, the windows of vulnerability are smaller and fewer than in doctrine. While the Bible tells us there is one faith, it does not say there is one church organization or structure. In all these issues of acculturation Plato's golden mean is a valuable aid: "Not too much or too little, but just a middle."

Sure Foundation

There are always organizational challenges to be met. Life in a missionary church is not static or unchanging. The church, with God's help, can meet these challenges and foil all attacks on her basic organization and beliefs. The foundations are sure and the people of God can build on them evangelistically.

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Chapter 3

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DEVELOPING NEW CHURCH STRUCTURES FOR MORE EFFECTIVE MISSION, NURTURE, AND GROWTH OF NEW BELIEVERS

JERALD WHITEHOUSE

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New Structures Needed for Effective Mission, Nurture, and Growth

The increasing diversity in the church and particularly the mission to the large non-Christian blocks represented by the Global Mission Study Centers has raised questions regarding the most effective structures for implementing mission and subsequent nurture and growth among these peoples.

Given the understanding that God is active in mission among the peoples both at the macro level in working "above and behind the scenes" in the affairs of nations and at the micro level in people groups in order to preserve truth among the peoples (White 1940:59) and in the lives of individuals to lead them in spiritual growth in context (Cornelius, Ethiopian eunuch), the question this paper develops is how does an organizational structure remain sufficiently flexible to cooperate with, encourage, and serve as the avenue for God's present and intentional activity in mission?

There is a certain tension in the Adventist Church's understanding and practice of church governance and mission. The church has espoused theologically the priesthood of all believers and its concurrent theme of the empowerment of the local congregation as the focus of the church's mission activity, but in practice it has been difficult to actually implement a strategy empowering members and local congregations.

The avoidance of congregationalism on the one hand has caused the Adventist Church to lean towards hierarchical and institutional models of church governance on the other hand, which hamper true member and congregation empowering strategies.

The growth in interest in the church planting and the cell church movement are examples of strategies which are gaining momentum, while at the same time there is a certain momentum towards maintaining more hierarchical structures and governance.

As we face the non-Christian religious blocks there is need to rethink our structures, particularly as new initiatives in contextualization are being experimented with.

It is important that the Adventist Church recognize from the outset that this is not simply the result of some human devised strategy or a new evangelistic method. None of the study center directors view it that way, but rather see the contextualized ministries as a very intentional effort to identify God's spiritual work in the various focus groups. It is an effort to cooperate with God's working within the cultural context of the focus group, to encourage spiritual growth, and the development within that people group of a viable witness to the truth about God and end time verities.

In this paper I will first summarize in concise form what I see as the issue and then the remainder of the paper will attempt to clarify from our field experience what is driving this as an issue.

If mission to a particular unreached people group (I use the term *unreached* with some caution, since it conjures up a series of questions as to what we mean by unreached and why a people are unreached or resistant, or is the difficulty with us, with them, or with both them and us?), is found to be more effective when conducted overtly separate from identity with the existing church organization; how, organizationally, will the Adventist Church relate to and encourage such mission initiatives?

Further, if the result of such mission to the focus people group is better served, more sustainable, more spiritually nurtured, and able to propagate itself

more effectively as God's last day people in that context by maintaining a "remnant identity" and organizational linkage distinct from the existing church, how will the Adventist Church relate to such "parallel" or "para" structures?

Will the linking with God's mission among the peoples of the earth take precedence and be the primary factor for developing structures that will facilitate mission while preserving the essential unity and mission identity of God's last day people? Or will organizational preservation take precedence over mission?

If we agree to "para" but strategically linked structures it raises another series of questions: (1) How do we administer church authority in these contexts? (2) How much church authority is necessary? (3) What linkage with the worldwide body of Seventh-day Adventist believers is essential? (4) How will tithe be channeled and utilized? (5) What organizational identity would we allow? (6) What are the essential elements of unity of the world Adventist family that must be maintained that yet allows for such diversity? (7) Where are the theological controls? (8) How will ministers be ordained and leadership appointed?

Let me broaden the issue a bit. Historically the cross cultural mission emphasis carried by the missionary to a foreign field was, in time, institutionalized and came under the control of the local church structure. The increasing demands of the institutional structure of the church, which in most cases tended to propagate itself within its own or closely related people groups, squeezed out the interest and the ability to move cross culturally into new unreached people groups. Now we have a presidential level entity, Global Mission, that has been assigned that task. Will the Adventist Church grapple with the structural changes necessary to facilitate this mission to the unreached? Will the resources, responsibility, and authority be provided to structures at the field level to affect cross-cultural mission to the unentered, resistant, unreached areas? Will all peoples be given access to the good news for the end time?

Is a somewhat separate but strategically linked structure necessary at the field level in order to facilitate the entry into unreached groups while not endangering the existing work?

What new structures could potentially funnel more resources, both personnel and funds, into the pioneer work necessary to reach the unreached?

Summary of the Issue

Certain New Believer Groups Are Not Able to Integrate into Existing Churches

The work being facilitated by the Global Mission Study Centers is resulting in new believer groups which are not able, for various reasons, to integrate into the existing local church. This has resulted in the establishment of new structures in order to provide nurture and allow for new growth among the new believers and to protect the existing church.

New believers from unique non-Christian backgrounds and high solidarity cultural groups coming into Adventist circles have essentially three options: (1) remain as some kind of “Jesus Jew, Jesus Muslim, Jesus Buddhist, etc.” and remain in the synagogue, mosque, or temple; (2) integrate into the existing church which is often culturally and socially distant; or (3) form some kind of new believer group composed of members from a similar background. Option two, which is the assumed normal way to proceed, has not been very successful in either accepting the new believer or in encouraging a vital, vibrant local church. Option two more often than not isolates new converts from different backgrounds and requires an acculturation into a foreign church for survival. Option one may be necessary in certain intolerant situations. Option three is a reality in current Seventh-day Adventist mission to unreached groups. What is happening reinforces the maxim that when we focus on building the kingdom of grace in people’s hearts the church happens, in context, and it may look different than policy would encourage. When Adventists focus on building the church, they tend to reproduce human weaknesses and specific cultural understandings of church.

Security Issues Often Prevent Integration

The issue of security for both the existing church and the new ministry for an unreached group who are generally hostile towards Christianity is also a factor in looking at new structures or even separate structures for certain groups. In the Muslim context, the work of the existing church, for people from similar background as its members, would be jeopardized if it were openly involved in “converting” Muslims. Where the church has been established for many years and has built up around a minority group in the country, that work needs to be encouraged and safeguarded while not preventing work for the other groups

as well. But in order to safeguard the existing church and the developing group of new believers it has been decided in some cases to keep the two activities separate.

Who Is Responsible for Mission to the Unreached?

This raises further questions: (1) Is the Adventist Church bound to the local congregation in order to reach out to other unreached groups in its territory? (2) If that local congregation, for whatever reasons such as historic prejudices, social class disparities, protectionism, or ethnic hatreds, all of which may be very deep seated and resistant to change, is unable to reach out to a large unreached group in its territory, what should Adventist leaders do? (3) Can the Adventist Church justify not taking the gospel to the Muslim majority in a country because the Hindu minority constitute the membership of the existing church? (4) If the church in a Muslim country is based on a refugee minority who have been historically mistreated by the Muslim majority, can Adventist leadership expect the existing church to reach out effectively to the Muslim majority? It seems obvious that in the human context in which we operate this is expecting too much at least initially. (5) Should the Adventist Church wait until God transforms the existing church into a loving body of believers who can reach across the gulf? (6) Or, should the Adventist Church look at other structures that may be more effective to implement a work and then work to bring understanding across the gulf?

Using a "Non-Institutional" Base for Mission To Non-Christian Blocks

Following on the issues noted above, it has been found more effective in certain non-Christian blocks to initiate mission activity from a non institutional base. This illustrates what has been referred to by others as the difference between the fortress model for the church and the salt model. The fortress model carries a strong institutional identity in its work, while the salt model suggests a more dispersive way of working with less concern about organizational identity.

The existing structures have simply been unable to effectively implement mission initiatives for the major non-Christian blocks. The reasons are many:

1. Ethnic prejudices which prevent reaching out to others of different background when the church structures are dominated by one ethnic group. Such tensions in the church often reflect the larger tensions in the society at large.

2. The identity of the Adventist organization with a very Western paradigm which is unwelcome among many major religions, cultures, and political blocks.

3. The identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the rest of Christendom, an identity which in some areas Adventists have courted in order to become accepted as a mainline Protestant denomination but which theologically Adventists reject in another sense, based on "Come out of her, my people" mission. If our calling out mission is really important, to warn that Babylon is fallen, that apostate Protestantism has in fact sold out to ecumenism and is already evidencing the hands across the gulf towards spiritism and Catholicism, then why are we so keen on identity as a Protestant denomination?

4. Islam, for example, sees Christianity in general, somewhat similar as did early Advent preachers, that it has become corrupted, that it has become the "inhabitant of every foul and hateful thing," and that it does not represent a godly way of living, etc. To be identified with the *institution* of Christianity is to place ourselves out of reach of the Muslim world.

In Eastern cultures a truly incarnational ministry is needed. When mission is conducted from an institutional base it is suspect. Association with a particular Western based religious organization tends to attribute to the missionary a list of questionable motivations: (1) personal gain, (2) institutional protectionism, (3) ethno-political domination, and (4) religious imperialism.

Institutional mission also impacts the "seeker" by generating devious motivations such as (1) immigration, (2) job security, (3) freer sexual standards, and (4) Western leanings in a person already marginalized in his own society.

Eastern cultures have been affected most profoundly, not by institutional structures, but by itinerant preachers, by pious men and women who lived, taught, and demonstrated true religion. Jesus himself was the supreme model. "The evidence of His divinity was seen in its adaptation to the needs of suffering humanity" (White 1940:217). This was non-structured mission of an itinerant preacher/healer. Mother Teresa is not revered because she was a Catholic, but because she was a godly, caring, and loving woman who put her faith into action in the streets and alleys of the big cities to the sick and dying, the widows and orphans. Such ministry does not require, in fact is perhaps more effective without, an institutional base for such ministries move from the heart base.

If the Adventist Church is really serious about creating a last day movement of godliness to prepare a people to meet the Lord at his soon return, it seems it will be more effective from a “movement” paradigm than from an institutional paradigm, particularly in the large non-Christian blocks.

Effective Structures for Sustainability of Mission

In our mission within most non-Christian blocks, establishing a *sustainable* witness that will continue effective mission and nurture requires a separation from identity with Western and Christian institutional structures.

There is a certain identity of Jewish-ness, a certain Muslim-ness or Hindu-ness or Buddhist-ness that must be maintained if one is to survive in that community while adopting a new spiritual understanding.

In the Muslim setting, identifiably Christian church structures (both organizational and buildings) are seen as the fortress of the enemy. As such they have been attacked, burned, and isolated, with the people being ordered and programmed to avoid them. Christian buildings and organizations are seen as unclean places, as attended by people who have given up faith in God, who eat unclean things and who are generally not truly spiritual people. Once the identity of “Christian Church” is attached to a group or a building in a village it is then off limits to the faithful in Islam. In strict Muslim communities the building of a Christian church would not be allowed. In more tolerant Muslim societies it would be tolerated but boycotted. In either case, it becomes very difficult for an identified church building or Christian group to witness effectively in a community. Cell groups in homes or groups meeting in prayer rooms or houses of prayer have been found more acceptable. In some places “Adventist mosques” or similar titles are being experimented with.

On the individual level when a Muslim identifies himself as having crossed over and become a Christian he immediately joins the camp of the enemy. Western Christians little understand the depth of feeling this generates in the Muslim community. Conversion to Christianity is seen as a denial of faith, spirituality, moral values, cleanliness, family values, and of God himself. Islam, being a shame honor culture, sees only one way to rectify this great shame that has brought dishonor to the family and the *Ummat Islam*. At the very least, in order to rid the family or community of the shame object, the person must be put out of the family; however, it often includes the killing of the offending person. Putting out or killing must be done to restore the honor of the family and

of the name of God and Islam. This is an inviolate rule. It carries no remorse or twinges of guilt on the part of the Islamic faithful when it is carried out. Therefore, it does not produce a reaction in Islam that would generate inquiry or searching after what made the person take such a bold stand in the face of death. The killing of a convert is not a “witness.” The father who can kill his own daughter when she has been discovered in premarital relations, and do so without a twinge of remorse, will take not a second thought about killing his son who becomes a *kafir* (Christian). If this seems harsh, consider the Old Testament laws which God provided to meet his people in the context of just such a shame/honor/revenge culture.

In this context, it is necessary to understand the cultural rules and adjust Adventist mission to be able to survive in that context (as God did in the OT). While at the same time Adventists must bring Islamic peoples the principles of the gospel and move them towards a belief in salvation. Such a ministry must be perceived by the society as not challenging their traditional values and spirituality. Instead it must call them to a deeper faith and spirituality in their context, at first as they perceive faith and spirituality, and then as the Bible instructs. To do so requires a divorcing from Christian identity and structures.

An example that could be developed in the Adventist interface with Islam is the concept of a truly faithful people at the end of time (God’s remnant in biblical terms), a concept already present in Islam. The prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is reported to have said, “The time will come when you are divided into seventy-two sects. A group among you will be my people, the people of Salvation.” It has, therefore, been found effective to call Muslims to build on their Muslim spiritual heritage, to come into God’s last day faithful people within the Muslim context, while still maintaining a basic Muslim identity which does not contradict biblical principles while moving to a more complete faith. The alternative of extraction and crossing over to Christianity has proven ineffective and destructive of viable spiritual growth in the majority of cases.

What Local Church Structures Are Being Encouraged?

What local church forms or structures are presently being encouraged? In looking at these alternatives Adventists should ask three questions about the particular location and people: (1) What is possible? (2) What is effective? (3) What is sustainable?

What is *possible* implies evaluating the local environment both within the Adventist Church if it exists in the area and in the Muslim and political environment.

What is *effective* asks what will effect spiritual conversion, nurture, and growth among the new believers. Also what will be effective in turn in reaching out to others from the identified people group?

What is *sustainable* is related to the first question of what is possible, but pushes us to think of the long-term survivability of this new believer group in context so as to continue to be an effective witness. This specifically challenges us to look further than the traditional extraction methods to building a community of faith that can support itself and propagate itself in its context.

We have found it helpful to describe the different local church structures and forms on a spectrum of C1 being a totally foreign body to C6 being a secret body of believers in a hostile context.

C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
Traditional National Church, Foreign Language and Forms	Traditional National Church, Common "Christian" Language	Contextualized Congregation, Non-Islamic Local Forms, Common "Christian Language"	Contextualized Congregation, Redeemable Local Cultural & Islamic Forms, "Muslim-Adventist"	Messianic Congregation Islamic Socio-Religious Identity, "Adventist-Muslim"	Secret, Isolated or Underground Believers

C1: The Traditional National Church

In linguistic, cultural, and religious forms, these churches are either foreign, or even offensive to the local Muslim population. By definition, C1 churches do not use the daily vernacular of the surrounding Muslim population (i.e., churches in Cairo speaking English rather than Arabic).

C2: Traditional National Church Using the Common Vernacular

Same as C1 except the mother tongue of the surrounding Muslim community is used. The religious vocabulary however may still be seen as "Christian" or "churchy" (i.e., names of prophets, holy books, etc.).

C3: Muslim Convert Congregation Contextualized to Selected Redeemable Local Non-Islamic Forms

A C3 congregation adapts local music, artwork, dress, ceremonies, folklore, customs, leadership patterns, and lifestyle rituals that are not Islamic in nature or which have had the perceived Islamic elements filtered out. Unless there was some reason not to, the mother tongue of the surrounding Muslim population would be used. A C3 congregation is linked at the local level to the Adventist organization. Example: Muslim converts going to local churches and having to adapt and use Hindu background forms which are used by all Christians in the area.

C4: Muslim Convert Congregation Contextualized to Selected Redeemable Local Forms, Both Islamic and Non-Islamic

This type of church would be similar to C3 except for the addition of some useful, biblically redeemable perceived Islamic forms which could include ways of praying, vocabulary (Islamic words replacing Christian terms where appropriate), dress, and lifestyle habits (i.e., choosing not to eat pork or having a dog). Unless there is some reason not to, the mother tongue of the local Muslim population would be used. A C4 congregation would be linked at the local level to the Adventist organization. Some have characterized this type of group as a "Muslim-Adventist" group.

C5: A Congregation of Believers Still Maintaining an Identity Within Islam

These believers meet together and follow Jesus as Lord, but would call themselves followers of *Isa* or *Hanif* Muslims (pure Muslims). They are by definition not linked to the local church, but may have loose ties to the church at some level. Over the past few years several such groups have developed in the Muslim world. By staying loosely within the framework of Islam, they avoid the stigma of "becoming Christian" or "becoming an apostate." In some contexts, due to legal restrictions, C5 would be the only way for Muslims who have accepted Christ to have fellowship with each other. Some would choose to still meet in the mosque, yet, they would also meet regularly with other Muslims who have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, study all the Holy Books but use the Scriptures as the primary source of truth, keep the Seventh-day Sabbath,

and confess belief in all Adventist beliefs. C5 is a reality in today's Islamic milieu. It has been characterized by some as Adventist-Muslims.

C6: Secret Followers of Jesus Within Islam

Either due to fear, isolation, lack of a local fellowship, or government ban on Christianity, C6 believers, either individually or in small groups, worship secretly. Many C6 believers have come to faith in the Messiah through dreams, miracles, because of radio broadcasts, or literature. C6 believers have little or no fellowship with other believers.

No Specific Entity Assigned Responsibility And Authority to Reach the Unreached

After the Foreign Mission Board was phased out in 1903, there was no entity assigned the sole task for devising and implementing strategies to reach the unreached or to share the Three Angels' Messages with unentered people groups. The General Conference Committee assumed this responsibility as did the executive committees at each level. However, the rapidly growing institutional work meant that the unentered territories and the remaining unreached people groups gradually were pushed aside and soon ignored under the pressures of the growing institutional work. Adventist mission became almost entirely focused on the reaching of peoples similar to existing members.

Global Mission has thankfully been created to begin to reverse those trends. But I would submit that it is only at the General Conference level that we have even a person(s) assigned full-time to reaching the unreached. I am not aware of any division, let alone union, that has even one person assigned full-time to reaching the unreached in its territory. All Global Mission coordinators at the division level share their responsibility with one, two, or three other departments. Essentially all efforts are aimed at maintenance and reaching people similar to existing members through traditional evangelistic methods.

Just in the past two years I am aware of a local conference president in one of the largest, fastest growing unions in the world field, ordering a local pastor to stop his successful work with Muslims, since it would not contribute significantly to church growth. Dare I say that I am pleased he did not follow the advice? The pastor was soon called to another field whose president was supportive and he is now involved in a successfully growing work among Muslims.

But that pastor has continued to face obstacles from certain leaders located two organizational levels above him who feel his Muslim work is a waste of time. Because of this, much of his work has been supported by private donations. Global Mission funds have been requested but not approved by either the Union or Division.

Should the Adventist Church allow the work for unreached peoples, making up nearly one-half of the world's population, to be at the mercy and the whim of a particular church leader? Or, should Adventist mission be crowded out by the pressures for church growth? Or, should Adventist mission be hindered by the pressures of institutional maintenance?

Some have proposed a reinstitution of a semi-autonomous but strategically linked Adventist Mission Board to focus on the needs of the unreached. Adventist Frontier Missions has begun to fill some of the void, but is this adequate? What structures are necessary to provide, at the local field level, the resources and the authority to implement initiatives to reach the unreached while not neglecting the existing work?

Specific Examples of Ministries Which Are Exhibiting New Structures

Asian Ministry

The contextual ministry in the Muslim community was begun in January 1990 after approval of a three-year pilot project plan by the Division Committee. At that time after 86 years of mission in the country, only twenty-two Muslim background individuals had been baptized through the traditional Christianizing approach. This traditional method of extraction had required a change of name, from a Muslim name to a Christian name, and a change of identity card with the government. In short, the new Muslim background believer was forced to reject everything Muslim and to identify and accept the totally new and foreign culture of the Adventist Church which was entirely of Hindu or tribal background. The resultant disorientation and instability seen in all of the converts can be attributed to this loss of identity, loss of valued reference points (which exist in the family in a group culture), and the burden of the shame that they brought on their family. These converts essentially "fell into our hands" since there was no open mission to Muslims. In fact, converts from Hindu and

tribal background members who constitute all of the existing church members in that country find it difficult if not impossible to support work for Muslims. The language and customs are different. There is a long history of tension and bloodshed which is still present today in the society between the Hindu and Muslim peoples.

Initially the plan for this ministry called for a simultaneous education of the existing church workers in contextual methods and in Islam, in an attempt to bring understanding and dialogue between the two groups. There seemed to be no enthusiasm on the local church's part at that time to pursue the sensitivity education. Then, in 1993 a disgruntled church employee who had been released for just cause, in seeking revenge, reported to the intelligence bureau of the government that the Adventist Church was involved in proselytizing Muslims and provided a list of names of those involved. An arrest warrant was issued for the president of the Adventist organization and the leader of the contextual ministry. The leader of the contextual ministry was able to leave the country for a few weeks, and the president of the organization was able to directly confront the intelligence officials, challenging them to provide evidence. The case was dropped, but as a result the church leader took the position at that time that there would be no further communication between the local church office and the contextual ministry. The name "contextual ministry" was dropped, and it was reorganized as a local ministry. The ministry has been able to receive a legal registration with the government. The linkage with the Adventist organization is only loosely maintained through a church leader in the country and more directly with the division office. The local church leader meets regularly with the leader of the contextual ministry to monitor the work, and there are at least annual visits by division personal. The ministry conducts an annual camp meeting which has been attended by sixty to eighty delegates from the growing work of the contextual ministry. Outside representatives from the division and another church representative from outside who are experts in contextual Muslim ministries have also attended on a regular basis.

Presently, the membership of the contextual ministry stands at around 2,000. Members are baptized by immersion after confessing belief in the Scriptures as the source of truth, Jesus as their Savior from sin through his death on the cross and present priestly work on their behalf, the Seventh-day Sabbath, and the other fundamental Adventist beliefs. The word Adventist is not used but rather an Islamic word is used to describe their deep commitment to God. The believers are also taught to defend themselves and their beliefs by using the

Qur'an. The believers identify themselves as God's last day people, a remnant in the Muslim community the same as there are God's last day people within the Hindu, Buddhist, and other religious communities. Many of the believers understand that there are other groups of God's last day people in other countries and that there is a worldwide group of believers who share the same beliefs who are called Adventists. The leader of the group is an ordained Seventh-day Adventist pastor whose service record is kept at the division office. Land has been purchased and registered in the name of the group and a training center is being developed. Tithe is collected and sent to the coordinating office of the group and is utilized internally in the ministry for spreading the gospel. There is an internal governing committee with the leader as chairman and composed of trusted, long standing members of the contextual ministry who serve as undershepherds in the ministry. All baptisms are conducted by the ordained Adventist pastor.

African Ministry

The following story occurred recently in an African country: On 7 February 1997 a message was received from a certain African country with a 5 percent Muslim population that a Seventh-day Adventist retired pastor had attempted to hold a "crusade" in a Muslim village. Because he had insulted Muhammad he was attacked and stabbed twice. His associate pastor was hidden by a Muslim woman to protect him. Two church members were beaten, the public address system, bicycles, and other equipment were taken, and the literature and Bibles were burned. Further reports later noted that the pastor had proclaimed that Muhammad was an epileptic, the Qur'an therefore being a product of epileptic fits, and that Jesus was, therefore, obviously superior.

On 15 February, just a week after the incident, a second pastor from the same country who is very knowledgeable about Islam and is working full-time in an Islamic area, was asked to go to the village where the attack took place to see what he could do to help the situation. Apparently the offending pastor was still in danger since the local people had put a reward on his head. Pastor "O" went to the area and took the offending pastor with him to meet with the Muslim leaders of the village. They both apologized for the unkind and inaccurate remarks. Further, pastor "O" explained to the Muslim leaders who Seventh-day Adventists are, emphasizing that they are people looking forward to the soon coming of the Messiah, that they believe the day of judgment is at

hand, and that the end of time is very near. He further explained that they are a group of people that are submitted to Allah and live godly lives in preparation for the end of time. Then pastor "O" pointed out to them that the Qur'an refers to a true people of the Book who believe in Allah, the last day, angels, practice works of charity, are steadfast in prayer, and forbids that which is forbidden. Adventists fit these qualifications. Pastor "O" further suggested that for the sake of greater understanding they engage in a series of dialogues on various topics. He and his assistant (a church member whom he had trained) would present the Adventist material and the Muslims could have two of their leaders present Islamic material on the same topic. The series was ten dialogues on the lives of the prophets. The Muslim leaders were so impressed by the apology and explanation which had never happened before that they agreed to the dialogues as a gesture of reconciliation.

The dialogues began on 19 February and were open to the village. As a result, on Sabbath, 1 March, 20 people were baptized. The Muslim leaders said, "We apologize for our attack on you. We did not know that you were fellow Muslims, of the Adventist sect." The Muslim leaders have agreed that those baptized were being baptized as "Adventist-Muslims," and have designated a piece of land for an Adventist house of prayer. There are no Christian churches in this village and no Adventist church. On 5 March two more Muslims were baptized. All equipment that was stolen has been returned. A lay pastor with a Muslim background, trained by pastor "O" has been assigned as the spiritual leader for the new "Adventist Muslim" group.

Ministries in Other Locations

Principles from the Asian ministry experience are being adapted and applied in ministries in other countries. These are at various stages of progress but all are showing promise of believer groups being established. The rates of growth will naturally vary since we are dealing with a variety of contexts. Countries which are directly applying principles from the Asian ministry include countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Other countries are further adapting the principles and trying various forms of a contextualized ministry in Central Asia, West Africa, the Philippines, and in North America. Plans are in process for developing contextual ministries in additional locations.

Adventist World Radio—Radio Church

Adventist world Radio (AWR) has sensed the need to develop a way to effectively disciple its listeners in areas where either there is no existing church and where open Christianizing is prohibited. AWR leaders have conceived of an AWR Radio Church which would allow membership by written declaration with the base in a neutral country. This concept has been approved by the AWR executive committee and is presently waiting for a specific need to arise for implementation.

ADDENDUM

Summary of Historical Background to Mission Structures In the Seventh-day Adventist Church

At the risk of oversimplification I will include a brief look at the history of mission structures in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the period 1889 to 1903 the rapidly growing mission work of the Adventist Church was managed semi-autonomously by a Foreign Mission Board, in the same way that the Sabbath School, Lay Activities, Publishing, and Health work of the young Adventist Church was managed by semi-autonomous associations. The reorganization process begun in 1901 gradually eliminated these and created Departments of the General Conference for all of the formerly semi-autonomous entities. All that is, except the Foreign Mission Board which was dissolved in 1903 and its work taken over, not by a department but by the General Conference Committee. This seemed, at the time, to work well under the leadership of Daniels and Spicer. The period of 1901 to 1930 saw the most rapid expansion of the mission work in Adventist history. Mission giving in North America as a percentage of tithe peaked in the two decades of 1910 to 1929 at 48 percent. Ironically, however, the seeds of decline of mission emphasis in the church had been sown.

1. No entity was assigned the responsibility of strategizing entry into new territories or for starting new work among unreached peoples. No entity was given the authority and resources to implement new work. The General Conference Committee assumed this function along with the management of the existing work. This worked well while Daniels and Spicer were in charge and while the institutional structure of the existing church was relatively small.

Membership in 1901 was around 78,000 and the number of institutions was small.

2. The period of 1901 to 1930 saw the most rapid growth of institutions in our history. This dramatically changed the character of the work. The focus of our mission endeavor shifted from entering new territories to operating and sustaining the institutions of the church.

3. Since the executive committees at each level were responsible for both new work and for staffing, supporting, and maintaining the exploding institutional structure, it does not take too much thought to see the result in terms of decrease in emphasis on cross-cultural, pioneer mission work. Beginning from about 1910 the travel and focus of leaders at the General Conference and division levels was almost entirely focused on the existing structure or on evangelizing through the existing structure to peoples similar to the existing members.

4. The secretariat took over the responsibility of recruiting missionaries for foreign mission service. But in actuality, the secretariat became a conduit for calls and requests from the overseas divisions. Instead of acting like a mission board, strategizing, and directing work for unreached peoples, the secretariat has functioned more as a department for interchurch aid, filling the needs of the existing institutional structure. This is good and necessary but should not preclude the other focus on the unreached that is equally necessary.

5. During this period the financial support of mission shifted from a mission appeal to a policy directed support as policies for tithe sharing and Sabbath School offering use were enacted. This shift has certainly provided a more predictable and stable resource base for the international mission work, but it has also seemed to distance the member from direct involvement in cross-cultural mission. The resultant gradual decline in mission giving and recent calls for more of the tithe to stay with local work should give us reason to re-evaluate the present giving policies.

6. The effect at the field level has also been profound. Without any specific entity assigned the responsibility and authority to enter new territories or begin work for unreached peoples, the maintenance of the institutions, the creation of new institutions, and the focus on evangelizing people like ourselves has shifted the focus from the initial cross-cultural momentum of the Adventist Church to the point where missionary outreach was absorbed and then lost as Adventist mission came under the control of church organization, which was completely absorbed with the existing work.

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Chapter 4

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ADVENTIST USE OF NON-CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

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The Religious Study Centers have been set up to reach previously unreached religious groups. Adventists have been particularly unsuccessful in reaching those within the four major living world religious traditions: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Chinese religions consisting of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism mixed in various combinations. More than a quarter of the world lives within these traditions. Neither have Adventists been very successful among the smaller living religions such as Judaism, Jainism, Sikhism, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism. Something that marks these religions from other religious traditions is that they all have canonical scriptures. Many new religions have begun over the last century. More than 130 million people are members of new religions. They are often based on one or more of the living religions, and focus on the same older canonical scriptures.

In addition there are more than 100 million followers of the traditional religions of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the South Pacific. While some have authoritative writings, most are ritual focused and their oral teachings have not become standardized. While Adventist mission cannot ignore these traditional religionists, they are beyond the scope of this discussion. There is also an increasing number of people who have no canonical scriptures who reject

authoritative writings. These secular peoples are perhaps the greatest challenge to Adventist mission but are also outside the purview of this discussion.

A Scripture Focused Religion

Adventists are a “people of the book” and a scripture-focused religion who evangelize with the Bible. Adventists regard the study of Scripture as essential for congregational and personal practice of religion. Adventists begin their definition of who they are with a statement of belief in the Bible and support their Fundamental Beliefs with Scripture references. As Adventist work with devotees of the living religions it soon becomes apparent that these people have a knowledge and respect for scriptures—their own scriptures and little knowledge or regard for ours. Christians seldom have any acquaintance with the scriptures of others, but we cannot ignore the issue of non-Christian scriptures.

Practical Use of Non-Christian Scriptures

A review of a range of ways scriptures are currently being used in Religious Study Center field projects might be helpful to start this discussion and begin to highlight the issues involved. The use of non-Christian scriptures falls neatly into three areas.

First, non-Christian scriptures can be positively used in our evangelism as a bridge from the known to the unknown in teaching new believers. They can also be used in subsequent worship to affirm the continuity of spiritual traditions and to give something familiar in worship for community visitors. For example:

- a. The use of familiar stories from the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and the *Puranas* as illustrations in the evangelism of Hindus.
- b. The use of the Qur’an in “Adventist” mosques and even in non-public house congregations in Muslim areas.
- c. The use of Jewish prayers in Adventist “synagogues” in Chile.
- d. The chanting of Buddhist liturgical requests for the five (universal) Buddhist precepts in Adventist congregations in Cambodia.

The Islamic case needs special focus, as the first questions about the use of non-Christian scriptures came out of the Islamic contextual mission experience. In the violently dangerous environment of a Muslim community, it was decided to initiate and nurture an Islamic remnant movement. To all intents

and purposes the converts remain integral members of their Muslim congregation. They continue to worship in Qur'anic worship environments in public, and in more biblical environments in private—"more" biblical, in that they continue to worship and study the Bible through and alongside the Qur'an in their home circles. This approach seems appropriate to develop contextual understanding of the faith among new converts, and to give them reasons for their faith so they are able to share with Muslim family and community.

There is also the element of safety. In places where *Shariah* law is honored, it is honorable to take the life of a convert. And apart from that, if the movement is exposed too soon to the community it could result in a violent reaction to the movement. Recently leaders of a congregation of Adventist "Muslims" were arrested and charged with being Christians masquerading as Muslims. Familiarity with the Qur'an paid dividends when these leaders were able to give reasons for their divergent beliefs and practices from the Qur'an, and they were acquitted of the charge. They were declared to be within the fold, albeit idiosyncratically. They were not identified as Christians.

Adventists are not comfortable being identified as "Christians" by the Muslim definitions for we repudiate many practices of other Christians. So, in such communities we feel more comfortable being identified as spiritually Islamic. But the point here is that Adventists do use non-Christian scriptures in study and worship.

Second, the use of our Scriptures in Adventist worship can be used in ways more familiar to people already using non-Christian scriptures in other ways. Like the way our contextual congregations in Sri Lanka use the Bible. Since the groups often include enthusiastic Buddhists, the groups meet on new moons to recite (chant) and memorize sacred ancient texts, texts like a modified Ps 119. By using our Scripture in ways that avoid unfamiliar usages in public, in preparation of new believers, and in initial worship we reduce the sense of foreignness.

Third, Adventists can offer their Scriptures to others to use in their ways, apart from evangelism or Adventist worship: like the 1,200 Burmese Buddhist soldiers who are now chanting the 23rd Psalm "twenty times a day" to calm their fears, and to protect them in battle situations on the Myanmar-Thai border. (Incidentally they are fighting against the rebel Karen "Adventist" army of General Bo Mea. Even "enemy" soldiers are anxious for their lives, and for the future support of their beloved ones. Adventists have not offered them Balaam

courses to use against their enemies yet, only white magic for personal protection so far.)

There are other ways of using scriptures such as solicitous community-service chanting of our "ancient sacred texts" before ancestor shrines in Buddhist homes, blessing the living and the dead in Hong Kong (where there are not enough Buddhist monks to do the job); and Friday evening candlelight scripture recitation and memorization, hopefully together with "Buddhist" neighbors in our usually-avoided churches in Japan.

Current Adventist Use of Non-Christian Scriptures

Use of Non-Christian Scriptures in Polemics

One Adventist use of non-Christian scriptures is their use in polemics, in unfavorably contrasting the teachings of defective "scriptures" with the teachings of the Bible. The intention of polemics is to defeat, convert, or at least disable a religious opponent or dissident. Polemics are opponent focused. Honest polemics are addressed openly; less respectful polemics attack religious competitors and opponents behind their back, or in their absence.

Christians usually conduct their worship services exclusively for believers and potential believers, so we feel safe becoming polemic. However, in most places this is a risky business. In some places polemics are a legal offense. In most places it is offensive to devotees of that religion who attend the services, or who will bear the brunt of the polemic when it is shared with them by good-intentioned believers. It is often also offensive to sensitive non-devotees, especially if the polemic is not accurate or fair.

There is a need for polemics, as Adventists help those struggling with a decision to become an Adventist. I would suggest that until a thorough comparative study has been done, a convert from another religion is only partially converted. There is a tendency among new converts to violently reject out-of-hand anything to do with the previous religion, which leaves the new convert religiously and culturally bankrupt. This also means the new convert will multiply unnecessarily the suffering of their family and friends as they observe the wrenching experience of conversion. On the other hand, many converts bring hidden, unresolved, incompatible ideas, attitudes, and even continued hidden former practices into the church. Polemics would help the new convert face up to both these dangers. There are contrasts and commonalties that need to be

addressed. However, polemics are usually best addressed privately not publicly. And polemics for potential non-Christian converts must necessarily focus on non-Christian scriptures.

Although we would feel comfortable with polemic use of non-Christian scriptures, we seldom use them this way. Most of our leaders are not familiar enough with the scriptures of their audiences to confidently use them in polemics. Some do use polemics, but unwisely and unadvisedly.

Use of Non-Christian Scriptures in Apologetics

Apologetics are the defense of orthodoxy against the challenge or attacks by heretics or by other religions. The challenge could be open, or it may even be implied or feared. The intention of apologetics is to strengthen the believers against the attraction or the confusion brought by exposure to other teachings. To the extent the attack on Adventism is public, to that extent apologetics can also be public. If the threat is more unintended, then apologetics are best handled more personally, with the people likely to be affected. Non-Christian scriptures are probably occasionally being used and referred to in the process of apologetics.

Use of Non-Christian Scriptures in Liturgy

The quoting of non-Christian scriptures in either attack or in defense is unlikely to be an issue for the Adventist Church; however, a new issue before this Mission Issues Committee is the positive use of non-Christian scriptures, particularly in worship. Can the Qur'an be used as a scripture for worship in hidden Adventist contextualized public worship? Can it be used co-jointly with the Bible in private, or authentic, contextualized worship among converts from Islam? Can Judaistic liturgical elements be included in contextualized worship in Jewish cultural contexts? Can such worship include the use of non-canonical Jewish texts? Can Buddhist scripture selections and liturgical elements be incorporated into contextualized Adventist worship?

Apart from their use in experimental contextualized congregations and alternative movements, the Adventist Church does not use non-Christian scriptures liturgically.

Use of Non-Christian Scriptures In Sabbath School Study

The quintessential use of scriptures in Adventism is in Sabbath School classes. In the Sabbath School Lesson Guides we have not quoted from Lao Tzu or Buddha or Mohammed or Shankara, nor have we quoted from a respected psychologist from New Delhi, a social worker from Uganda, an orthodox bishop from Georgia, or a farmer from Peru, for that matter. The non-biblical authorities quoted are usually Western, and often secular, authorities.

Study guides could be enhanced by references to the readers' own respected authorities. And among the most important and respected authorities are their scriptures. Such connections are not merely interesting for the members, but a source of ideas and arguments to share with family and neighbors. We have found that one year after being inducted into Adventism, new members have nothing to talk about with non-Adventists anymore. The worlds have moved too far apart. Sabbath School lessons contribute significantly to this re-education.

Should we, then, quote from the Qur'an, the *Bhagavadgita*, the *Tripitaka*, or the Lotus or Heart Sutra in our lesson guides? How would the average American Sabbath School member respond to authorities like that? Would they yawn, or would they protest?

Should Adventists be striving to produce universal authoritative study guides? The argument for standardized lesson guides is to hold errant ideas at bay; however, the errant ideas focused on are almost exclusively North American ideas. The problem areas being dealt with in the Religious Study Centers are seldom protected by the universal lesson guides. Is there a case for regional cultural versions of the study guides on selected common topics? Relevant to our discussion here, how can we begin to introduce informed references to respected non-Christian scriptures for the sake of regional Sabbath School members?

The Use of Non-Christian Scriptures In School Religion Curricula

The same issues are reflected in religion curricula. We could assume that where most of the students are from Adventist families, teachers would feel comfortable with using both polemics and apologetics openly in class. How-

ever in many, if not most Adventist schools, we have a mixed student body, and both polemics and apologetics are often counter-productive. That would be especially the case in mission schools where the student body is mainly non-Christian.

So the question that needs to be addressed is the degree to which non-Christian scriptures, and non-Christian religions, should be introduced into the religion curricula in Adventist church schools, mission schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries? And to what extent could their treatment be positive?

There is general resentment among both non-Christian students and their parents towards the level of Christianity and Adventism that has to be dealt with in Adventist schools. While we might feel that the non-Christians have the freedom not to come to our schools, in many cases it is not that simple. In many places we have the most conveniently located school, or might offer the most desirable education, or we capture the market with the only affordable education alternative so non-Christians have to choose our school. In such situations, does our ownership justify our religious agenda? We attract non-Christian students (we could not survive without them) then impose our religious curriculum on them. Aside from our right to provide a complete Adventist education for the (few) Adventists attending, and our desire to maximize the exposure of non-Christians clients to our beliefs, what about the spiritual rights of the students? Young people from other religious traditions spend the only childhood and youth they will ever have being heavily evangelized by those in authority over them. Does that not border on professional abuse?

We rejoice with those who find a saving relationship with God in our schools, but we should cringe at the number of young people who end up rejecting all religion as the result of our aggressive curriculum. As I have talked with non-Christian students in our schools and colleges, as well as listened to the evaluations of their believing classmates, I have been grieved at the levels of resentment left after years of Adventist education and have wept for the lost years of spiritual blossoming that have been missed.

Both students and parents have expressed immediate enthusiasm for a curriculum which would take seriously the religious traditions of the students and their families. Such a curriculum would necessarily include sensitive and even positive introduction to, evaluation of, and use of non-Christian scriptures. As far as we are aware, our schools usually do not deal seriously or positively with non-Christian religions or their scriptures in the religion curricula.

The Use of Non-Christian Scriptures In Seminary Training

Although non-Christian scriptures are so crucial to the interaction between our Scripture-focused religion and the world religions with their scriptures and uses of scriptures, seminary training virtually ignores non-Christian scriptures. Apart from general comparative religion introductions, the seminarian is not equipped to handle non-Christian scriptures in any of the ways needed to interact with serious non-Christians. As far as we are aware, our seminaries do not deal seriously with non-Christian scriptures or in the non-Christian uses of their scriptures in their courses.

The Theological Issues

In the past, discussions on biblical authority have not usually begun with a consideration of Hinduism and the *Vedas*, Buddhism and the *Tripitaka*, Islam and the Qur'an, and so on. But it is the logical place to start. And it will be the strategic place to start in tomorrow's world. "Increasingly, behind the questions having to do with biblical authority will lurk the specter of competing authorities inherent in the sacred books of the non-Christian religious traditions" (Hesselgrave 1994:18-19).

The Religious Study Centers have been set up to reach previously unreached religious groups. To the extent we have tried to respond to, deal with, and even use the canonical scriptures of the people we reach out to, we have seen how effective that has been. However, effectiveness aside, close encounters with non-Christian scriptures raises a number of theological issues. We should begin by affirming our support of the Adventist view of our own Scriptures: *Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (Ministerial Association 1988:4).*

The issue before us today is not the revelation and inspiration of the Bible, but what to do about and with non-Christian scriptures. The first issue is the issue of revelation and inspiration. Are non-Christian scriptures also inspired by God in any way, to any extent? Do they include revelations by God, or not? They obviously contain truths, but tested by the measure of biblical truth, those truths are always mixed with error. What has been God's role, if any, in the

production of these mixed teachings? Some of the truths within non-Christian canonical scriptures seem to have been a force for good. They seem to have held the world back from a horde of evils. Some of the errors allowed and even promoted within the canonical scriptures of other religions have had profound negative effects, especially as barriers to accepting the gospel. Can God have been in any joint partnership with the great deceiver in producing erroneous non-Christian scriptures?

We know the familiar, "all (Jewish) scripture is given by inspiration from God, Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 3:2). What about those who spoke and wrote the non-Christian scriptures? Were the authors of non-Christian scriptures inspired or moved by the Holy Spirit? Can any of them be regarded as inspired prophets? How we respond to these questions will affect our use or non-use of non-Christian scriptures.

Other Christians and Non-Christian Religions and Scriptures

The ultimate object of faith is not Christ, the Mediator, but God, the Father. . . . So it does not seem surprising that there are a lot of Jews, and Gentiles too, who are saved although they believe in God alone, either because they lived before Christ or because, though they have lived after him, he has not been revealed to them. In spite of this they are saved by means of Christ (John Milton, in *Christian Doctrine*).

There are a whole range of evaluations of non-Christian religions and scriptures to be found among various Christian traditions. John Sanders in *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, classifies the positions broadly as: restrictivists, universalists, and inclusivists. Inclusivists are those that allow for revelation among the unevangelized, and the possibility of salvation for the unevangelized. Of interest to us is that John Wesley was the most famous proponent of inclusivism in the eighteenth century. Is it possible that Ellen White also supports the inclusivist position because of her Methodist background?

The Spirit of Prophecy and Non-Christian Religions and Non-Christian Scriptures

In the light of the Bible's relative silence on the subject, Ellen White's statements about truth and inspiration among the heathen, that is, among the non-Christians, is astounding. In the Spirit of Prophecy commentary of the Christmas story in *Desire of Ages*, the providence and inspiration of God among the heathen is almost a major motif. "Outside the Jewish nation there were men who foretold the appearance of a divine instructor. These men were seeking for truth, and to them the Spirit of Inspiration was imparted. One after another, like stars in the darkened heavens, such teachers had arisen. Their words of prophecy had kindled hope in the hearts of thousands of the Gentile world" (White 1940:33).

So the writings of "teachers" among non-Christians and among other religions include truths revealed to them by God—inspired truth. But those truths are not so clear—the Old Testament had the clearest revelation of truth. That there is error in other religions is clear in the same Spirit of Prophecy passage: "At this time the systems of heathenism were losing their hold upon the people. Men were weary of pageant and fable. They longed for a religion that could satisfy the heart" (32). "Through heathenism, Satan had for ages turned men away from God. . . . The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion. . . . Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin" (35-36).

So there are truths within the authoritative writings of non-Christian scriptures. But not all is true. Presumably we are to use the truth in the Bible to determine what is true and what is not true in the non-Christian scriptures. And whatever is in accord with biblical truth can be assumed to have been inspired by God, and the rest not. That places a heavy burden on the cross-religious evangelist. Final judgment on a teaching can only be made after the exegete has come to a definitive understanding on the teaching of the Bible. We all know how often a new understanding of a passage, even of a truth, has dawned on us. And yet we need to evaluate the validity of teachings found in non-Christian scriptures. We will certainly not want to be more than tentative in our judgments.

The process seems so involved that some may ask why bother seeking for pearls in the chaff of non-Christian scriptures? The missiological reason is because they are important for our hearers. Because they have heard the voice of

God speaking to them in their scriptures, and because they should continue to rejoice in the way the Lord has led them and their culture in the past.

By ignoring the revelation of God in the scriptures of others, we belittle their previous religious experience. By continually ignoring their religious heritage we pronounce damnation on their religious heritage. We can expect the effect on those who accept our implied judgment to be emotionally and spiritually crippling. More often the sincere seekers in that other tradition reject our judgment of what they have known to have been good, and reject the religion we promote instead. Could it be possible that Adventists have been particularly unsuccessful in reaching those with canonical scriptures, because our open or implied demand has been for those scriptures to be totally rejected?

The Scriptures Use of Other Scriptures

The outside sources and references in the Bible are not easily accessible. Here we need the input of our Old and New Testament scholars.

In the Old Testament there is apparent significant borrowing and modifying of motifs, symbols, and even stories from surrounding societies in the Old Testament. I have read that some Psalms could be appropriated pagan hymns. Psalms 29 could be adapted from a hymn to *Ba-al*. Verses 1-2 seem to be a believer's introduction to the appropriated hymn, but from verse 3 onwards the psalm is possibly the hymn. *Ba-al* was god of the waters, of the well-heads and springs, thunder was his sign, he was the cloud-rider, and was the god of fecundity and birth, even of animals. Some say the "cry" in Ps 29 (in his temple all cry, "Glory") is not a Hebrew worship form, but was more characteristic of *Ba-al* worship. If Ps 29 was a hymn to *Ba-al* re-ascribed to Jehovah we would have an example of an Old Testament use of non-Hebrew scripture.

It is not much easier to find evidence in the New Testament. Jesus left no writings at all. There are many quotations and allusions to known and sometimes unknown Jewish sources. Even quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures often seem remarkably loose by our standards. Apparent quotations of accepted canonical oral sources are used. Sometimes to undergird arguments like, "you have heard that it was said to the people of long ago," and sometimes as points of departure like, "but I tell you" in the Sermon on the Mount.

I have been told that John 1 is probably an appropriated pre-Christian hymn to *logos*, or wisdom. The form is poetic, in Greek the object of one phrase becomes the subject for the next, and so on. The name of Jesus seems to be

suppressed until verse 17. The historical “comment” in verses 6-9, “there came a man who was sent from God,” seems to be added into the middle of the poem. It has been noted that the logos theme of this passage is not developed or even used for the rest of the epistle, strengthening the argument that John 1 is quoted from another source, possibly from non-Jewish scripture.

Clear examples of use of non-Christian scriptures in the New Testament are hard to locate. There are few extant writings from the period or even from among Jewish writers. It would be expected that a study of Paul’s use of other writings would be the most informative; however, his letters are not easy to decipher at this distance—it has been said they are full of ambiguities, complexities, and attacks on half-forgotten adversaries. Some scholars identify some hymnic features that indicate when Paul is quoting from now unknown (therefore non-canonical) ancient liturgies or ritual settings. We would need to know a lot more about the scriptures of those to whom Paul was writing before we could know how he used non-Christian scriptures.

However, there is that remarkable address to the members of the Areopagus, where Paul makes no reference to the Jewish canon at all, but quotes from a philosopher and from a poet known to the listeners. Of particular importance to the issue of non-Christian scriptures is Paul’s references to a Greek poet in this sermon. The whole body of this message reflects the teaching of the Stoics. He establishes several points of agreement. He says God does not dwell in temples. The pantheistic Stoics would not disagree. He says God gives life to all things. The Stoics would agree. Then in verses 26-29 he presents two core ideas of the Stoics—that the entire race is one offspring from God, and that God exercises providential care for his creation. To establish those commonalties Paul quotes from Stoic writings.

But just as significant is the absence of any reference to the Jewish Scriptures whatsoever. Summaries of other sermons in the Early Church record typically not only refer to biblical persons, but actually quote from the text of the Scriptures. Here the lack of reference to “our scriptures” is deafening.

Surely the absence of biblical quotations and the entirely positive quotations from non-Christian known literary sources is instructive for cross-religious evangelism.

Then there is that remarkable parable of the rich man and the beggar. The story contains many heretical elements—truth mixed with error—but Christ relates, or even creates, the story uncritically. Ellen White’s commentary on Christ’s method here is remarkable: “In his parable Christ was meeting the peo-

ple on their own ground. The doctrine of a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection was held by many of those who were listening to Christ's words. The Savior knew of their ideas, and He framed His parable so as to inculcate important truths through these preconceived opinions" (White 1923:263).

While scriptures are not specifically mentioned, to meet people on their own doctrinal ground, to teach truth through the beliefs they held, even though those beliefs included error is a close parallel to using non-Christian scriptures to teach particular important truths. It is contextualization to a degree we have seldom dared attempt.

Although some may plead it as a special case, the New Testament use of Jewish authoritative scriptures in evangelism among Jews may be indicators of how to use non-Christian scriptures among other people. Peter's sermon during Pentecost, Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin, Paul's sermons to the Jews of the Diaspora in synagogues, especially early in his missionary experience, are examples of extensive quotation from the scriptures of the listeners.

Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament have any witness to the use of non-Christian scriptures in the ways the Religious Study Centers have tried using them, and are proposing to use them. We expect that changed circumstances create new issues that need new solutions, not inconsistent with the solutions for previous issues, but nevertheless new. We are doing mission in a post-Christian age. The rejection of Christian mission has become institutionalized, in some cases has become canonized dogma. In these circumstances we find that use of non-Christian scriptures, especially in positive ways, is one of the most effective methods to cut through generations of prejudice. And even more important, in some places it is essential for the physical survival of the church.

Other Cultural Issues

Scripture Behavior: Non-Christian and Adventist Treatment of Their Scriptures

And finally, there is the separate subject of how we should treat and use our own Bible in public, and among ourselves, in the face of the traditions and practices of the religious communities we want to evangelize, and the religious communities among which we establish ourselves. In many places Adventists

are seen as arrogant and disrespectful of the traditions of others. But even worse, Adventists are seen as very crude religionists—ones who teach their followers not to respect their parents, or their ancestors, and who do not even show proper respect for their own holy places, their own sacred times, or toward their own sacred Scriptures and objects.

Islamic treatment of the physical scriptures ought to suggest many issues for both mission to Muslims and worship practices in relation to Bibles for Adventists in Muslim communities. Should Adventists adopt Islamic scripture-handling traditions, invent their own distinct practices, or consciously reject and declare their rejection of elements of Islamic practice? It seems that whatever we do, it would be good to raise the importance of scripture treatment to an issue for official decision.

The same question could be asked of mission to people with other traditions and practices of handling, reading, and listening to scriptures.

Buddhist scriptures are often written in particular languages, inscribed with particular scripts, on particular materials, in unique formats. They are kept in particular cupboards, are held in particular ways, are listened to with particular specific postures and hand positions, and so on.

Should Adventists give attention to developing their own distinct respect conventions, or to what extent should they adopt and adapt the traditions of the religions in the communities they are reaching into, or are living among? Treatment of scriptures needs to be a focus of mission, not just Scriptures as standards of doctrinal belief and life-practice orthodoxy.

Conclusions

This paper deals with the issue of the use of non-Christian scriptures. We have looked carefully at scriptures because we are scripture focused—in our belief and practice, and in our traditional mission approaches. However, the focus on scriptures is somewhat artificial. We need also to look at other modes of spirituality—at the use of images, icons and imagery, ritual and liturgy, *mun-dras*, *mantras*, chanting, sounds and silence, dance, apparel, food offerings and fasting, flowers, incense, and pilgrimages. Even our second mode of worship, song and music, might do with re-analysis in the various environments we wish to witness and live. Sometimes what we do is as problematic as what we do not do. But maybe the issue of scriptures is the best place to start—at a place nearest home.

We have naively believed that we can ignore the authoritative texts and beloved scriptures of peoples, and still make an irresistible appeal to their spirituality. That we believe it is reflected in our seminary curriculums, where we seldom make serious study of the scriptures of others, let alone the use of scriptures. We are so confident about the unimportance of religious culture that we send mixed-up college kids around the world as student missionaries, in some cases as our front-line evangelists into religiously complex worlds, worlds less secular by far than our own.

Appendix A

God Outside of Israel and Christianity

Behind the issue of revelation and inspiration is the question of God's providence, of faith, and even salvation outside of the economies of Israel, Christianity, and even Adventism.

In the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a revelation of the role of God in the history of one nation, Israel, and so has little to say about the role of God with relation to the other nations. Commands discouraging positive contact or association makes positive information on other nations even rarer. There are, however, glimpses of God's providence and even revelation outside of Israel.

In the Pentateuch there was high priest Melchisedek of Salem; blameless and upright, God-fearing Job of Uz; priest Jethro of Midian (allowed to offer sacrifices in the tent of meeting, Exod 18:12); commended Rahab of Jericho (cf Heb 11:31); prophet Balaam of Pethor, in connection with the establishment of Israel, and alternate arrangements provided for displaced nations (Deut 2:5, 9, 19, 21-22; cf 2 Kgs 5:1).

In the historical books there is the commended marginal Ruth; the truth-seeking queen of Sheba; the commended and never nationalized Naaman; the independent servant of God, Cyrus of Media-Persia (Isa 45:1-7).

In the prophetic writings there are Gentile sailors who "feared the Lord greatly," and "offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows" (Jonah 1:16); there are hints of God's other "exodus" interventions for other nations (Amos 9:7). In these writings sometimes the prophetic evaluation of other nations is positive, and sometimes positively contrasted with Israel.

However, in the Old Testament there is no clear positive evaluation of any non-Christian religions or scriptures. God calls nations to account for moral failures, rather than religious variations (Amos 1:1-2, 8; Obad 15; Nah 1:2; Zech 9:1).

In the New Testament

The New Testament focuses on the revelation of God through Jesus Christ, and on the early development of the religion that takes its inspiration from Jesus. It has little to say about other religions. There are glimpses, however.

In the gospels there is the astounding role of the God-guided (inspired) wise astrologers of the East; there is Christ's positive identification of faith, even superior faith, among non-Israelites, in retrospect in the widow of Zarephath and in Naaman of Syria, and in his time, in the Centurion of Capernaum (Matt 8:10), the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21-28), and the Greek woman of Syro-phonencia. (That is not inconsistent with positive appraisals of the faith, and even salvation, of particular Gentiles as found in current Jewish literature, like in 1 Enoch 108:11-14.)

In the record of the post-ascension Early Church there is Peter's astonished discovery that God has no favorites, but "accepts from every nation those who fear him and do what is right." Luke's treatment of the God-fearing Roman centurion is critical for this issue. The Gentile is informed by an angel that his prayers and alms are accepted by God. He was accepted, and therefore already saved while worshipping God as he knew him, not God as revealed through Israel, or as Jesus as recently revealed. In this context Peter declares that "anyone" who fears God is acceptable to God; he declares Jesus is the Lord of all, without exception; recollects that Jesus healed all who were oppressed by the devil, without religious distinction; that the same universal Jesus will be the fair judge of all; and concludes that everyone who "believes" will receive forgiveness (Luke 10:35-43). Peter's insight was of a righteousness derived from an appropriate relationship with and towards God regardless of the nature of the revelation.

The record of Paul's revolutionary re-evaluation of God's role in the nations is one of the main motifs of the non-Jew Luke. He features the paradigm shifts of this Hebrew of Hebrews, who eventually declares publicly that God made all nations, and was intimately involved in their particular histories with salvific intention that all men would seek him, and perhaps reach out for him and

find him. Luke features three sermons by Paul—a sermon to Jews, a sermon to pagans, and a sermon to Christians. The tenor of the whole address of Paul before the image-making and image-worshipping Areopagus is astoundingly complimentary, “I see that in every way you are very religious.”

This is the end of a journey for Paul, and is not typical in early Christianity. Paul later declares that God is the God of the Gentiles (Rom 3:29); however, there is no record of a focused Church discussion of the other religions and scriptures.

Implied Teachings on Non-Christian Religions

Universal Intentions

Apart from these specific instances of God's intervention in the lives of individuals, there are a number of texts that give indications of God's positive attitudes and intentions towards non-Israelites, and even non-believers. There is Paul's statement, “We have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Tim 4:10). There are the texts declaring that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, which does not seem to exclude all non-Israelites (1 Tim 1:15; John 3:16-17). The portrayal of Jesus as the light to every human who has ever been born is another indication of universal availability of salvation (John 1:9). Jesus' success in attracting sinners, that is, in the synoptic gospels, those who willfully refuse to follow Mosaic commands, would be inconsistent with intention not to attract sincere people outside the purview of revelation (Luke 15). Jesus' prayer for the ignorant Jews, “Forgive them for they don't know what they are doing,” would seem too inconsistent with an exclusion of the non-Israelite or Christian ignorant peoples (Luke 23:34). Another example is the indication in the parable of the wedding that people are rejected because the bridegroom does not know them, not because they do not know the bridegroom. These texts support the universal intentions of God.

Universal Covenants

The covenants between God and man are not exclusive. The Adamic covenant is universal (Gen 1:26-28); the Eden covenant has no exclusions (Gen 3:15); the Noahic covenant is made “with all flesh” (Gen 9:18-19); the Abramic covenant has the blessing of “all the families of the earth” as its purpose (Gen 12:3); all other references to the Abramic covenant include the universal in-

tention of the covenant (Gen 18:18; 2:18; 26:4; 28:14); and no later covenant abrogates this universalism.

Appendix B

Non-Christian Scriptures

Canonical Scriptures and Their Uses

The invention of writing has led inevitably to written formulation of religious thought that claims sacred status. The special status is attested by both popular tradition and elite religious authorities. The teachings of this canon can serve different functions—as a standard of orthodoxy, a source of religious prestige (possessing, preserving, interpreting, or transmitting them), a basis for spiritual practices in which words have spiritual efficacy (written on protective charms, chanted in rituals, or inscribed on monuments), and as sources of reliable divination.

A revealed religion like Christianity tends to be exclusive in its claim to orthodoxy. The Bible is the revealed will of God, and so is the judge of all other claims to truth. Other scriptures are unnecessary, and even suspect or dangerous, and their study, let alone use, would not be encouraged. Adventists have not used non-Christian scriptures positively in mission or worship. However, in our encounter with religions with written canon the question has arisen, can we ever use non-Christian scriptures at moments, and in the particular (sacred) way we use our Scriptures? Can we use non-Christian scriptures at the most sacred moments of our reform Protestant tradition—in formal worship and in the sermon discourse?

Coming from the reform Protestant tradition, Adventists focus on scriptures as the standard for orthodoxy. However, a careful look at popular Adventism finds evidences of the use of the Bible for other functions, such as for identity, status affirmation, and for spiritual efficacy. A correlate issue relating to the use of scriptures should be the use of our own sacred writings. Can we, either in mission or in worship in particular religio-cultural settings, use our scriptures in ways more nearly approximating the way non-Christians use their scriptures. This is an issue that goes beyond the issue of orthodoxy.

Use of Non-Christian Scriptures

Our use of non-Christian scriptures could vary according to the nature of the various kinds of scriptures. We should take a moment to review the scriptures that are authoritative for non-Christians. This is not a theoretical exercise. For a majority of the world these are the most sacred teachings. The teachings are treasured. It is the mission of the remnant Church to develop a clear message in the face of these scriptures. Just reading through the list will be a useful exercise in expanding our sense of mission unaccomplished.

Scriptures of the Major World Living Religions

The scriptures of the world religions demand special attention. There are five major living world, religious traditions: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Chinese religions consisting of Confucianism and Taoism.

The Islamic Scriptures

The scripture most accessible to Adventists is the *Qur'an* with its claims of being a revealed scripture that overlaps the subject matter of the Bible. For Muslims the prophets are the intermediaries between God and man. Christians and Muslims hold our prophets in common—Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. All the prophets, named and unnamed, had a single message—submit the self to the will of God. Jesus is one of the prophets of Islam. The revelation of Mohammed is believed perfect and final, and an accurate record of God's message by the prophets of every age.

The basic scripture of Islam is the *Qur'an*, which was revealed by the angel Gabriel to the prophet Mohammed. The *Qur'an* was revealed in the Arabic language, and the 114 suras were gathered into the definitive text within a generation of the prophet's death.

Sunni Muslims revere the *Sunnah*, the teachings of Mohammed based on the *hadith*, the sayings of the prophet collected by his companions and dealing mainly with Islamic law. The Shiite Muslims revere the *Nahjul Balagha*, the collected sermons and sayings of Au, the son-in-law of Mohammed.

The Buddhist Scriptures

Therevada Buddhist Scriptures. The sacred records and commentaries of the *Tipitaka* of Therevada Buddhism are primary scriptures for 110 million people in Sri Lanka (Sinhalese), India (in Mahadastra and Naga Land), Bangla-

desh (the Barua, Racine), Myanmar (the Burmans, Shan, Mons, and Racine), Thailand, Laos (the Lao), Cambodia, and for Western Therevada Buddhists (particularly in the UK, Germany, and the USA).

This Pali language canon consists of three kinds of scriptures: the *Vinyana Pitaka*, rules and precepts for monastic life; the *Sutta Pitaka*, discourses and dialogues of the Buddha; and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, scholastic and philosophical treatises. In all there are about 67 books.

Selections from these scriptures that are primary texts are: the *Dhammapada*, verses of righteousness—sayings on practice and ethics taught in all schools; the *Khuddaka Patha*, a simple catechism of precepts and teachings; the *Sutra Nipata*, the *Udana*, and the *Itivuttaka*, the Buddha's teachings on the way of liberation, balance, and self-control, condemnation of prejudice, and traditionalism. These scriptures are as well-known to Therevada Buddhists as the Bible is to Christians. Our mission to Therevadins must begin with these texts—using them in the development of apologetics, to defend ourselves against the opposition and prejudices against Christianity that is built on them, and in polemics, to stand clear on our differences with them.

Mahayana Buddhist Scriptures. The Pali canon, in its various Sanskrit translations, is also authoritative, but less familiar, for another 200 million Mahayana Buddhists in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, among the Chinese in Southeast Asia; and among the Vajrayana Buddhists in China, Tibet, Mongolia, Russia (Buriyata, Kalmykia), Nepal, and Bhutan.

Mahayana Buddhists all identify an eternal, transcendent reality, much more specifically than the non-theistic Therevadins. They focus on the ideal of the Bodhisatvas, persons of infinite compassion who pledge to help others to salvation. A number of identified Bodhisatvas are worshipped at a popular level, as spiritual benefactors. There are vast collections of scriptures, written in Sanskrit, and collected in the Chinese and Tibetan Tripitaka. Each Mahayana school venerates particular canonical scriptures, supplemented by texts from the founders of the school.

The *Saddharma-pundarika*, or Lotus Sutra, is the most important of all Mahayana scriptures and is of most importance to a mission and message for Mahayana Buddhists. It teaches the doctrine of one vehicle—it promises that regardless of their sect or practice, all beings will surely attain Buddhahood. It contains the doctrine of the eternal cosmic Buddha, whose abundant grace is the source of all salvation. And it teaches that salvation is available through faith in the sutra, faith in the "gospel." Attitudes and values and prejudices

arising from these teachings are the biggest challenge to Adventist mission in countries touched by Mahayana Buddhism; thus, it deserves the attention of our sympathetic use, our apologetics, and our polemics.

The Lotus Sutra has long been a primary Buddhist scripture in China. It is the central scripture for the T'ien-t'ai school of China, Tendai school of Japan; and the sects inspired by Nichiren in Japan. The important scriptures of Pure Land Buddhism, the grace-focused protestantism of Buddhism, are the two *Sukhavativyuha Sutras*, which describe the vows of Buddha Amitabha to lead all people to the Pure Land; and the *Amitayur Dhyana Sutra*, the meditations on Buddha Amitayur.

The *Avatamsaka Sutra*, or Garland Sutra, is the scripture of the Chinese Hua-yen, and the Japanese Kegon schools.

The sutras on the perfection of wisdom, the *prajnaparamita*, are widely studied in all schools. The most famous are the *Prajnaparamita-hridaya Sutra*, or Heart Sutra, on the naiveté of Therevada teachings; and the *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra*, or Diamond Sutra, the paradoxical utterances which stimulate a deeper apprehension of emptiness.

The Diamond Sutra is the starting point for Ch'an Buddhism of China, and Zen Buddhism of Japan. The primary scripture for Ch'an Buddhism is the *Sutra of Hui Neng*, or the Platform Sutra. The *Mumonkan*, or the Gateless Gate is as close to a scripture as you will find in Zen Buddhism.

Located as they are on the watershed between the two main schools of Buddhism, Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism has the most complete collection of Buddhist scriptures. While studying and preserving the texts of the Therevada canon, Tibetan schools also revere the great commentators, Nagarjuna, Shantideva, Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, and Dharmakirti, as the Bodhisatvas, and their commentaries as scriptures. The works of the founders of the four Tibetan traditions are also accorded scripture status: the teachings of Gyalwa Longchenpa, Sakya Pandita, Milarepa, and Lama Tsong-ka-pa.

Any mission for particular Mahayana sects must take in serious account the favored Tripitaka canonical text of that sect or school, and the primary work of their founder.

Vajrayana Buddhist Scriptures. Alongside Mahayana Buddhism, the Tantric Schools of Tibet have their own esoteric practices and sacred texts. Some of the better known are the *Hevajra Tantra*, the *Kalakakra Tantra*, the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

Other Buddhist Scriptures. There are hundreds of other Buddhist scriptures, many little known to the West, many untranslated. These are known, studied, and practiced by particular groups of Buddhists. But as we have not begun to tackle the major schools, perhaps analysis of the more esoteric scriptures needs to be postponed.

The Chinese Scriptures. The Chinese blend the teachings of what they call the Three Teachings (San Chiao)—Confucianism for education and ethics; Taoism for personal enlightenment, and in the face of crises; Buddhism in regard to death and the afterlife. It would be artificial to divide the scriptures into separate religious categories.

The Classical Scriptures. The five ancient scriptures of China are: the historical Book of History (Shu-ching), the Spring and Autumn Annals (Ch'un-chu), the almost biblical, poetic Book of Odes (Shih-ching), the idealistic Books of Rituals (Li-ching), and the divinational Book of Changes (Yi-ching or I-Ching). The Book of Changes has become canonical for both Taoism, focusing on divination; and, with a Confucian commentary, for Confucianism, focusing on yin-yang metaphysical philosophy.

The Confucian Scriptures. While maybe less than scriptures, the commentary of Chu Hsi, together with the four books of Confucianism, approach scripture status for neo-Confucianism today—that is the Analects (Lun-yu), the aphorisms of Confucius; the Mencius, the work of his successor, the Great Learning (Ta-hsueh), a foundation text for education; and the Doctrine of the Mean (Chung-yung), a philosophical exposition on Confucian thought.

The Taoist Scriptures. The most important scriptures of Taoism are the most difficult to translate or understand: *Tao-te-ching*, attributed to the legendary Lao Tzu, and the *Chuang Tzu*, which contains the essence of Taoist thought. There is a vast Taoist canon of mystical and ritual texts, often emphasizing divine rewards and punishments which affect life-span in this life and in the hereafter.

We have never begun a serious mission for Chinese. Chinese believers are “brands plucked from the burning” and their descendants. Chinese social structure makes change particularly difficult. So, for two strong reasons, our Chinese Adventist churches are caught in time warps of outdated Adventism. It is difficult to see how a powerful message for Chinese religionists can be developed.

The Scriptures of Hinduism

Hinduism defies description. It is not a specific religion, but is the name given to a range of religions from the Indian sub-continent. As stated so long ago in the Rig Veda, "Truth is one, and the learned call it by many names." There are, however, a number of common features between most Hindu religions. Adventists have hardly dealt with any of these doctrines and practices.

Hinduism's long tradition has produced many sacred texts. The most ancient are the "revealed literature," the *shruti*. These include the *Vedas*, the *Rig Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, the *Vajur Veda*, and the *Atharva Veda*. These have been transmitted orally for 3,000 years. They are hymns, ritual formulae, chants, and prayers. They are addressed to the powers of nature, as manifestation of cosmic truth. It is said that all essential elements of Hinduism can be found in the *Vedas*. The *Brahmans* are prose amplifications of the *Vedas*. The 108 *Upanishads* are philosophical and mystical deliberations on germinal ideas in the *Vedas*. The greatest commentator, Shankara, identifies the eleven most important *Upanishads*. The general trend of the *Upanishads* is to identify Reality as a supra-personal Brahman, who is "not this not that," and who is one with Atman, the universal self found in all men. Liberation is to realize the Atman within, but transcend ego-self—our actions and desires.

The most widely known Hindu scripture is the *Bhagavadgita*, and it is here Adventists might make a proper start. It has been called "India's favorite Bible." Its emphasis is on selfless service. It sanctions several paths for salvation, but is distinctively monotheistic—teaching devotion, or *bhakti*, is the supreme way to approach God and receive his grace.

Other later texts are called sacred traditions, or *smirti*, and have less authority. These include the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Although these are less authoritative, their influence has spread wider than the revealed scriptures. They can be vehicles for Adventist comment throughout Indo-China and even in other parts of Southeast Asia.

The *smirti* texts dealing with *dharma*, duty or law, such as the *Laws of Manu*, and the *Puranas*, may be an important backdrop for the Adventist judgment message. The *Puranas* are concrete stories and examples of the ethical basis for Hinduism, and are enormously influential in the popular religious expressions of modern India. Adventism must deal with the *Puranas*.

Tantras are manuals of religious practice. A mission focused on those following or influenced by yogic techniques, whether Hindu, Buddhist, or New Age, will need to speak to the *tantras*. *Tantras* are manuals for a symbolic ritual

training to transmute ordinary desires into practicing identification with the universal reality. A beginning point could be the *Kularnava Tantra*.

Hindu philosophers, saints, and poets have produced voluminous literature. The *Sutras* and their commentators delve into specialized realms of philosophy, and would already be covered if we had already dealt with the Vedas and Upanishads.

For many in India, devotion literature speaks more powerfully than the philosophical. It is doubtful that Adventists with a mission for these peoples have developed the devotional aspects of our faith, or have considered appropriate use of devotional expressions that are familiar to the people. Perhaps a prime example of a devotional people are the Lingayats of Karnataka province in southwest India. They have a personal religion of devotional monotheism that has dispensed with temple and priesthood. They probably would not be attracted by propositional Adventism. Their scriptures are the *Vacanas*.

In recent days Hindu ideas transcend cultural limitations, and varieties of Hinduism have moved beyond the cultural limitations. And progress in speaking with and to the essential elements of Hinduism would probably find a wider usefulness in the New Age influenced, postmodern urban cultures.

The Scriptures of the Smaller Living Religions

Then there are the scriptures of smaller living religions. Those religions are often more cultural-specific, and include religions like Judaism, Jainism, Sikhism, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism.

The Scriptures of Judaism

The Jewish Bible, or *Tanakh*, consists of the Law, or *Torah*; the Prophets, or *Nebi'im*; and the Writings, or *Ketuvim*. In addition there is an oral Torah, the *Talmud*, including the *Mishna* and the *Gemera*. These interpretative perspectives of rabbis are considered authoritative for the observant Jew. Beyond these, the Jewish tradition hallows the books of statutory prayers. The *Kabalah* or mystical tradition has canonical status for many Jews. A number of theological works, like *The Guide to the Perplexed* by Moses Maimonides, and the *Shulhan Arukh* of Joseph Caro, are also held in high regard.

The Scriptures of Jainism

Jainism has around 10 million followers in India. Their scriptures, or *agamas*, began with the *Purvas*, the sermons of Mahavira, most of which were lost. The two branches of Jainism disagree on the canonicity of the surviving *agamnas*. The *Tattvarthasutra* and the *Sanmatitarka* are authoritative to both. The Shvetambara Jains revere another twelve scriptures and thirty-four subsidiary texts. The best known are the *Uttaradhyayanya Sutra* and the *Kalpa Sutra*. The Digambara Jains look on a large collection of scholastic expositions (*anuyoga*) as authoritative. What messages and practices can Adventists bring to their mission to the Jains?

The Scriptures of Sikhism

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion with about 20 million adherents. It teaches devotion to God and denial of egoism as the basis for a good life. It is a reform of Hinduism and Islam. The writings of the first five Gurus, or reformers, were collected as the *Adi Granth*, and have been granted the status of an eternal living Guru in themselves, the *Guru Granth Sahib* which is the object of ultimate sanctity and the source of sacred inspiration, and the highest authority for the Sikhs. It is a collection of sacred poems sung to music. It seems that a serious mission to Sikhs should take seriously the *Adi Granth* itself as well as the forms of reverence and means of devotional expression. The *Adi Granth* contains verses from Hindi and Muslim poets. Can Adventist worship include singing selected verses from the *Adi Granth*?

The Scriptures of Shinto

Shinto is the indigenous religion of the Japanese people. It coexists with Confucianism and Buddhism. Shinto is centered on worship of mystical deities called *kami*. It emphasizes inner harmony and sincerity. It is not a religion mediated by written scriptures, but certain writings are central to its spirit. The classics are the mythologies of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* and the ritual texts of *Engishiki* and the *Kagura-uta*.

The Scriptures of Zoroastrianism

Less than 100,000 Parses practice Zoroastrianism today, mostly in the Bombay area. However, Zoroastrianism has had considerable influence on many branches of Christianity and Islam. Their scripture is the *Avestra*, the main liturgical text, the *Yasna*, and the core are the *Gathas*, or hymns of Zoro-

aster. An Adventist mission to modern Zoroastrians will need to deal with their liturgical practices.

Traditional and New Religions

There are more than 100 million followers of the traditional religions of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the South Pacific. The largest is perhaps the Yoruba religion, with 30 million adherents. Some have authoritative writings, however, many are ritual-focused, and their oral teachings have not become standardized. While Adventist mission cannot ignore these traditional religionists, those concerns are beyond the scope of this presentation.

Many new religions have begun over the last century. More than 130 million people are members of new religions. Often they are based on one of the world religions; sometimes they are a syncretism of two or more religions. Most have their own sacred writings, often commentaries by their founders on earlier scriptures. Some of these writings have achieved the status of scriptures—they are the measure against which all other teachings are tested. Rather than list all those commentaries, some of the larger movements and more canonical scriptures will be identified.

Among the Hindu new religions are the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Theosophical Society, the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, the Ananda Marga, Transcendental Meditation, the international Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the movements of Meher Baba, Sathya Sai Baba, Bhagwan Rajneesh, and others.

Japanese new religions include the Buddhist new religions of Risshō Kōsei Kai, Sōka Gakkai, and Agon Shū; the Shinto new religions of Tenrikyō, with its four scriptures, *Mikagura-uta*, *Ofudesaki*, *Osashizu*, and *Koki*; the new syncretistic healing religions of Omoto Kyo, the Society of Jōrei (with its scripture *Jōrei*), Mahikari and Sukho Mahikari (with the *Goseigen*), Sekai Kyusei Kyo (with the *Holy Sutra for Spiritual Healing*), and Perfect Liberty Kyodan.

Korean new religions include indigenous revivals of Tan Goon Church, the Tae Jong Church, the Hab Il Church, and the Chun Do Church. Their most important scripture is *Chun Byo Kyung*—the principles of heaven which govern the prosperity of man and the cosmos.

The Baha'i Faith grew out of Sufi Islam. It has its own scriptures, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, the *Book of Certitude*, the *Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah*, and *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.

Christian new religions include the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints with its *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*; and the Jehovah's Witnesses, with their own Kingdom version of the Bible, and the authoritative writings of *The Watchtower*. There are new syncretistic independent churches like the Kimbanguists in Zaire; the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star in Nigeria; and the Rastafarians in the Caribbean. The Church of Christ, Scientist relies on *Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. The Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon has *Divine Principle*.

Summary

This compendium of non-Christian scriptures will undoubtedly have been tedious, and not surprisingly so. No one has to deal with all religious traditions at the same time. Those working with Muslims only have to look at issues relating to the *Qur'an*, and perhaps to the *Sunnah* or the *Nahjul Balagha*. Those working with Jodo Buddhist devotees could start with just the *Lotus Sutra*. However, this is a committee of Global Mission. It should have become very apparent to us here that we have not begun to take the non-Christian scriptures seriously.

Appendix C

Other Christian Scriptures

Working among non-Christians is a challenge to consider, but work among Christians might be a challenge that needs revision. Reflecting the insights we gain from working with non-Christians, we might find that our attitudes towards (in comparison) fellow Christians also need new thinking. Attitudes have changed in a changing world, but sometimes our Protestant-Catholic stances seem frozen in another time. We have to decide what to do about Christian traditions that also have to hear our message. Is it enough to just be publicly polemic these days?

When working among Catholics and the Orthodox we have to decide what to do about the their deuterocanonical books, such as Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit and Judith, and the Macabees. Among Roman Catholics and the various Orthodox and Oriental Christian churches we have to decide what to do about their versions of the Bible, and their other authoritative texts,

like the writings of their Church Fathers, and authoritative documents like the Papal Encyclicals. Among Christian denominations we might have to decide what to do with particular Bible versions, like the *Schofield Bible*, when working with dispensationalists. Or even how to deal with the more liberal translations and paraphrases which signal drifts in how scriptures are seen, and how revelation and inspiration are perceived and responded to in this age.

Other Adventist Scriptures

While we continue to debate the relative roles and levels of inspiration of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, it should be apparent by now that that issue will not be so critical in the eyes of religions that have many levels and kinds of authoritative and sacred text. We will need, however, to clarify the authority of both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy differently in different environments. A standard introduction just will not do. Read this now, in the shade of the introduction to non-Christian scriptures:

Seventh-day Adventists believe one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested (Ministerial Association 1988:216).

This special role of the Spirit of Prophecy is easier to present to Buddhist listeners than to most Christians.

Scripture Versions

In reaching, and subsequent work and worship among converts from various Christian traditions; the use of particular versions of Scripture may be significant. Insistence on using particular "more holy" versions we are attached to may be an obstacle for mission among some people. Often our choice of versions rests on cultural biases more than on theological or missiological principles. We might need to take some positions in relation to our undisputed canonical scriptures—particularly in relation to authoritative dialects and versions.

Appendix D

Adventist Use of the Christian Scriptures

Christians are one of the three so-called “peoples of the Book” religions that are theistic religions with a clearly revealed and communicated Word of God. That is not typical of all religions. Among the non-revealed religions of Asia, the scriptures are never a final word. Adventists have looked on the non-theistic religions in a particularly negative way. It should be noted that the Christian use of the Bible is at the very least a puzzle, and often seems ridiculous to Buddhists.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam claim spoken and written divine origins for their canonical scriptures. Adventism is clearly in that tradition: “Seventh-day Adventists believe the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (Ministerial Association 1988:4).

Use as the Authoritative Word of God

Adventists have largely truncated the use of Scriptures to their use as standards of orthodoxy—orthodoxy of belief and practice. Listen to our creedal definition of scripture: “Seventh-day Adventists believe that in this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history” (Ministerial Association 1988:4).

The narrow role of scriptures represented here becomes particularly evident as we examine and experience the ways other religions use their sacred writings. We scour the Scriptures for what they have to say about what we should believe and how we should live. That is not typical of the use non-Christians make of their scriptures.

Use as a Sacred Object and for Divination

Exegetical study of the Scriptures for standards of orthodoxy is not the only way ordinary Adventists use the Bible. That is particularly so, but not exclusively so for Adventists converting from non-Christian traditions. Among

the less orthodox use of the Scriptures by Adventists are: singing scripture as a more sacred expressions of praise; reading and recitation of favorite scriptures, for their spiritual effect; memorization of scriptures with no attention to spiritual effect, as a kind of rite of passage, a rite of identification—in family worships, Sabbath School classes, and for qualification for advancing in youth leadership levels.

Adventists are not entirely unfamiliar with the use of the Scripture for spiritual efficacy or even divination. The reciting or reading of particular scriptures at dangerous moments, such as fear, danger, loss, sickness, death, and uncertainty often involves more than just reminders of authoritative belief. The use of texts on plaques, in posters, and on stickers seem to border on use as charms. And then there is use of scriptures for divination: excessive dependence on randomly selected texts, with utter disregard to exegesis, as a primary, if not sole, basis for life decisions. Random selection of words and sentences are treated as clear messages of direct divine guidance. It is notable that the same divination process is not used with non-sacred text, like, say, from a newspaper.

Adventists also have many ritualistic ways of treating the Bible as a sacred object: only having it handled or read by qualified, or non-unqualified persons at services; reading it from a particular lectern in services; reading it in a particular voice or tone; favoring archaic dialects (not just in the English-speaking church) because it sounds more religious; displaying the Bible on dedicated stands in churches; favoring binding it in particular colors (black, navy blue, maroon) and peculiar cover materials (leather); holding and carrying the Bible in particular ways; keeping it in a higher place; not placing anything on top of it; keeping it off the floor; carrying it on a cushion at weddings; carrying it in a breast pocket in war; placing it above the headboard at night, during sleep, or under the pillow, in times of fear or ambivalence. And, strangest of all, the trivial use of scripture information in quizzes and games, not for any spiritual function, but as an acceptable activity for sacred time on the Sabbath.

As this is unofficial behavior, our authoritative statements make mention of only the use of scriptures in establishing orthodoxy. Later we will contrast this with the focus non-Christian religions make on behavioral aspects of the handling, reading, listening, and keeping of sacred scriptures.

Use for Prediction of the Future

Adventists bring another function of the study of Scripture that is even less typical. Focusing on an event, the Advent, we have become super-chronologically focused in our study of our Scriptures. We leave no text unturned to discover the chronology of sacred history, particularly in the inaccessible pre-historical past, and the inaccessible prophesied future. That use of Scripture is familiar only to millenarian cults among the non-Christian religions.

The orthodox among the world religions look with a jaundiced eye on those within their own tradition who focus on prophetic interpretations of scriptures. And we wonder why they are not attracted to prophecy-focused evangelism advertising, or to Daniel and Revelation seminars.

Adventist Secondary Scriptures

While we continue to debate the relative roles and levels of inspiration of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, it should be apparent by now that that issue will not be so critical in the eyes of religions that have many levels and kinds of authoritative and sacred text. We will need, however, to clarify the authority of both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy differently in different environments. A standard introduction just will not do. Read this now, in the shade of the introduction to non-Christian scriptures: "Seventh-day Adventists believe one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is the identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested" (Ministerial Association 1988:216). The special nature of the Spirit of Prophecy is easier to present to Buddhist listeners than to most Christians.

Favored Versions of the Bible

Surprisingly enough, we may need to re-examine our position in relation to our undisputed canonical scriptures—particularly in relation to authoritative dialects and versions.

Other Adventist Scriptures

Taking a broader definition of scriptures, the *Church Hymnal*, the *Lesson Study Guides* are treated by some and viewed by on-lookers as scriptures or quasi scriptures.

Appendix E

More on Sabbath School Study Guides

The quintessential use of Scriptures in Adventism is in the Sabbath School classes. At a recent annual division meeting it was stated, once again, that the Sabbath School study guides were one of the most important instruments for world unity, and that, whatever other changes are made, the study guides should be used universally. Have we looked at these study guides from the perspective of other cultures? I personally try to use them. I often teach classes from them in a range of countries and communities. But has the church really looked at the study guides as religio-cultural documents?

For example, a recent lesson, Lesson 6, 2-8 November 1997 entitled “Modern Demons” is about the demons of secular Western societies. The people who wrote the lessons must of necessity write from their own experience—they have no other experience. But their experiences are not universal, and the problems they have encountered are not universal problems, absolutely not. The writer for that week obviously had two heresies in mind—Western power encounter theologies, that see demons everywhere on the one hand, and secular skepticism that explains away all demons on the other. However, these are not universal demons. Other places have different “modern demons,” ones not addressed in this lesson.

And then there were the extra-biblical authorities quoted in the study guides. The authorities quoted in this one lesson include: Mark I. Bubeck, of Chicago; Chris Thurman, of Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Moore, of New York; Herbert Benson, of unknown origin; Elisabeth McSherry of the National (presumably USA) Institute of Health.

The writers must quote authorities they know. But for the quotations to be interesting or effective, they must be authorities the readers know and accept. Have the study guides ever quoted from South American, African, or Asian authorities?

You might say, the local translators and teachers can bring in local color in their translations and teaching. They could, but they do not. Translation is usually done in a rush, by translation experts. Teachers either do not have the expertise or the time to be original, or more often, try to be faithful to the study guides, so we get translated quotations from Marki Iya Bub-eck of Chi-ca-go ("how do you spell that," the faithful ask), and so on, over and over and over again.

Have we considered the cultural messages we drive home when every perspective is a Western perspective, every question is a Western question, every authority is a Western authority, and every illustration is a Western illustration? When have we referred to Lao Tzu, or Buddha, or Mohammed, or Shankara? When have we quoted from a respected psychologist from New Delhi, a social worker from Uganda, an orthodox bishop from Georgia, a farmer from Peru? Not that even those kinds of insertions would solve anything either. How would the average Western Sabbath School member respond to authorities like that, from experts they had never heard of before? Would they yawn, or would they protest?

Just as it makes the lessons more interesting, more relevant, and more current to American members to quote from interesting and respected American authorities, so lessons would be enhanced for other members by referring to their respected authorities. And among the most interesting and respected authorities are their scriptures. Not merely interesting for the members, but a source of ideas and arguments to share with family and neighbors.

When did we last quote from the *Qur'an*, the *Bhagavadgita*, the *Tripitaka*, or the *Lotus* or *Heart Sutra* in our lesson guides? I have noticed that one year after being inducted into Adventism, new members have nothing to talk about to non-Adventists any more. Their worlds have moved too far apart. Sabbath School lessons contribute significantly to this re-education.

I am not advocating peppering the Sabbath School study guides with quotes from the non-Christian scriptures either. Can you imagine the response to a quote from the *Bhagavadgita* in a Bible-belt Adventist church? Most would not even have a clue what the quote was all about to begin with. At worst, some might become angry and upset at the use of pagan scriptures and see proof of an omega conspiracy; however, a focus on Sabbath School study guides does spotlight the cultural and religious bias of everything Adventists do in their churches, for it points out a bias that affects our capacity to use non-Christian scriptures.

So let us get back to study guides consisting of safe cut and paste selections from Spirit of Prophecy and Bible texts, you might respond. But that would not help the cultural bias very much. The selection of topics, the logic of the argument, the assumptions of local teachers and members, and the assumptions concerning the types of discussion that are appropriate all introduce a cultural bias into the classes.

The Spirit of Prophecy is not free from cultural bias, and needs extensive interpretation to make Ellen White's inspired insights understandable and relevant in some settings. We do that exegesis all the time for our own use of the Spirit of Prophecy. But in the study guides that exegesis is pre-packaged for the teacher and for the member, and the religio-cultural effect is irreparable.

Neither is the "plain Word of God" free from cultural incomprehension and bias. The moment we begin to interpret and explain the Bible for the class, or the congregation, a cultural bias is introduced.

But there remains this perennial heavy message—we must hold to the Sabbath School study guides, they are the only thing holding our church together. And maybe they are. In many places they are followed slavishly by the devoted few; it keeps them together.

What are the alternatives? Should the preparation of the guides be shared around among the dominant cultures of the church on a quarterly basis? Should each week be presented from a different cultural bias? Can you imagine the incomprehensible combinations that would result? How long would it take for a universal rejection of such guides?

Should we give up on worldwide study guides and leave every cultural region or even every teacher to their own bias and resources? I do not think so. I have been made aware of the theological and philosophical forces even within our church that are laying siege to even non-negotiable beliefs and practices of the church. And how crucial the standardized study guides are to balance the heresies offered regularly to church members, even from their own church pulpits. So I do not think a free-for-all is advisable. However, once again, the focus is on the dangers in the Western church—and particularly the American church. The church in other places is wrestling with issues not imagined or reflected in the study guides.

I agree that we must try to keep this church together. However, rather than striving to produce universal authoritative (orthodoxy standard) documents, the Sabbath School Department could put much more effort in soliciting universal issues from the world field. On the basis of worldwide expressed con-

cerns they could come up with topics for Sabbath School study. They could then facilitate regional discussion and identification of the relevant regional perspectives on the selected topics. They could provide a range of the more universal resources for the topics—biblical passages, Spirit of Prophecy selections, and a range of commentary materials. They could encourage regional seminaries or other experts to provide a range of regional resources addressing the topic. Then they could facilitate, in every way, the writing of regional cultural versions of the study guides on the selected topics.

If we wanted to really develop into a global church, summaries of the concerns of each cultural region could be made available as part of the study guides—either as the introductory lesson (“our members in Africa will be looking at this topic from this perspective this quarter”) or as an appendix, for the interested.

A broader spectrum of voices is needed in deciding which topics are presented in the Sabbath School study guides. For the church to hear only one voice is inadequate. Perhaps a General Conference committee comprised of a range of members able to appreciate the regional perspectives could give final approval to the range of study guides produced. In this electronic age, these committee members would not need to meet on location.

However, whatever checks and balances get put into place, we have to trust God’s various servants in the end, anyway. As it is, most corruption of the message occurs at the local church level. However, a regional version would be followed more enthusiastically and faithfully than the current, often incomprehensible and definitely religio-culturally biased, guides. In other words, the firewall function envisioned for the current study guides would be multiplied to the world church, rather than just the innovative Western church.

Relevant to our discussion here is the suggestion that regional Sabbath School Study Guide writers should be encouraged to make informed references to the respected non-Christian scriptures of their region.

Appendix F

More on Treatment of Scriptures

There is the separate subject of how Adventists should treat and use the Bible in public, and among ourselves, in the face of the traditions and practices of the religious communities we want to evangelize, and the religious commu-

nities among which we establish ourselves. In many places Adventists are seen as arrogant and disrespectful of the traditions of others. But even worse, are seen as very crude religionists—ones who teach their followers not to respect their parents, or their ancestors, and who do not even show proper respect for their own holy places, their own sacred times, or toward their own sacred scriptures and objects.

Consider the Islamic teaching and practice on respecting scripture:

If Moslems have the space, the *Qur'an* may be kept in a special room which is kept clean, and used only for prayer and reading the holy text. Others make a shelf for the *Qur'an* high up on the wall, so nothing can be placed above it.

When not in use, the Book is usually wrapped in cloth, so no dust falls on it. If text from the *Qur'an* is used as a wall decoration in any form, it is carefully placed on the wall people face, so people do not stand with their backs to the Holy text.

When the *Qur'an* is in a room, Muslims are expected to act with reverence, and not to behave in that room indecently, rudely, cruelly, or selfishly. Inappropriate television programs should not be viewed in that room. The presence of the *Qur'an* in a room evokes an attitude of prayer, it is a silent reminder of a Muslim's submission to the will of Allah.

While the *Qur'an* is being recited aloud, Muslims are taught not to speak, eat, drink or smoke, or make distracting noises.

Before touching the *Qur'an*, the Muslim is to be in a state of ritual cleanliness. Full ritual cleanliness involves washing the hands up to the wrists three times; rinsing the mouth three times with water thrown into the mouth with the right hand; sniffing water into the nostrils and blowing it back out, three times; washing the whole face, including the forehead, three times; wiping the top of the head with the palms of both hands together; washing the ears with forefingers; wiping the back of the ears with the thumbs; wiping the back of the neck once; washing the right foot and then the left foot, up to the ankles, three times; and letting water run from the raised hands to the elbows three times. This washing is to be done in a quiet, prayerful manner. While they wash, Muslims are encouraged to pray they will be purified from sins committed by hands or mouth, and that they will be empowered to walk the way of righteousness, and not stray from the path. All this is done before touching the *Qur'an*. Muslims are encouraged to be ritually and spiritually clean, if possible, or to at least wash their hands.

Women cover their head as they touch or read the *Qur'an*. Women menstruating or who have recently given birth are discouraged from even touching the *Qur'an*.

The notion of preparing the heart and mind before opening and reading the scriptures is familiar to all religions. But many Muslims adopt a particular sitting posture to read the *Qur'an*—a loose cross-legged position that promotes discipline and alertness. The *Qur'an* is often placed on a special stand, the *rehll* or *kursil*, in front of the reader. Muslims are taught it is disrespectful to place the *Qur'an* on the floor. When the reading is over, the *Qur'an* is put away carefully. It is never left on a table, where something might be inadvertently put on top of it.

Islamic treatment of the physical scriptures ought to suggest many issues for both mission to Muslims, and worship practices in relation to Bibles for Adventists in Muslim communities. Should Adventists adopt Islamic scripture handling traditions, invent their own distinct practices, or consciously reject and declare their rejection of elements of Islamic practice? It seems that whatever we do, it would be good to raise the importance of Scripture treatment to an issue for official decision.

The same question could be asked of mission to people with other traditions and practices of handling, reading, and listening to scriptures.

Buddhist scriptures are often written in particular languages, inscribed with particular scripts, on particular materials, in unique formats. They are kept in particular cupboards, are held in particular ways, are listened to with particular specific postures and hand positions, and so on.

Should Adventists give attention to developing their own distinct respect conventions, or to what extent should they adopt and adapt the traditions of the religions in the communities they are reaching into, or are living among? Treatment of scriptures needs to be a focus of mission, not just scriptures as standards of doctrinal belief and life-practice orthodoxy.

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Chapter 5

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THE BOUNDARIES OF CONTEXTUALIZATION IN MISSION: HOW FLEXIBLE AND ABSOLUTE ARE THEY? WHAT PRINCIPLES SHOULD GUIDE THE CHURCH?

BERTIL WIKLANDER

January 13-14, 1998

The organizers of this meeting have given me a task that needs to be approached with humility. The topic of contextualization in Adventist mission is complex, and if we are not careful, it may generate discussions of almost anything the church is, does, and teaches. At the same time, it is an important topic that must be handled honestly and seriously. Identifying principles for how we share our faith with the billions of unreached people in non-Christian cultures will always be a controversial venture, inevitable, and yet complex and risky. Needless to say, it cannot be done unless we submit ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and listen to each other.

In this paper I proceed on the assumption that contextualization of Seventh-day Adventist faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary, and that it is already taking place around the world, albeit with varying degrees of success.¹ In the paper just presented, Dr. Dybdahl has offered a useful defini-

tion of contextualization and has explained why it is an issue in our church. I shall build on his foundation.

I also assume we agree that there are boundaries to how far contextualization can be taken. The question that I seek to address is, rather, where those boundaries are and how we can identify them. What are the core beliefs and practices that constitute Adventism and provide the unifying factors within our diversity? How do we safeguard our core beliefs and practices when they are being adapted to a non-Christian culture? Can we map out some guidelines that help us distinguish between biblical contextualization and the fatal error of syncretism? Recognizing the limitation of time, I can only draw a broad sketch of the issues.

I intend to proceed at three levels: (1) adopting a language, or models, that identify boundaries between the *context of human culture* and the *theological fundamentals* of the church; (2) evaluating how flexible and absolute those boundaries are; and (3) discovering guiding principles for (a) protecting the church, its identity, unity, and the divine truth that God has revealed to us as his people, and for (b) pursuing our mission in each cultural context without being unduly constrained by foreign or imported cultural elements, or church traditions that are not an integral part of biblical faith and that therefore are irrelevant in leading people to God as Savior and coming to a knowledge of the truth (cf. 1 Tim 2:3-4).

My task is to lay a foundation for a meaningful discussion in this group of church leaders and theologians. I believe that is best done by being a bit provocative, while retaining a constructive purpose. I make no claim to having all the answers, but hopefully, our discussions and prayers may bring further clarity, so that, by the grace of God, the light may increase as we move forward together.

Authentic and Relevant Contextualization

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the history of how an increasingly institutionalized church, with roots in North America and Western culture, reaches out to the whole world in obedience to the Great Commission and the Three Angels' Messages. While our theology, ethics, and church life tends to become more and more stable and comprehensive,² our commitment to Global Mission calls for a self-critical, open, and dynamic approach, as is appropriate for a mission *movement*.³

During the 1980s our mission focus changed from *territories* to *peoples* or *people groups*, and this Global Mission emphasis has increased the need for the church to come to grips with the phenomenon of contextualization. We are reminded of its urgency by the front-line mission workers and evangelists who seek to make the gospel relevant to every "nation, tribe, language and people." In our discussions of the boundaries of contextualization, therefore, we must keep the *practical realities* of Global Mission in mind.⁴

This change is not a threat but a challenge and an opportunity. We can meet it by honestly assessing what is unique about our life and message, why it is different, why it should not be absorbed into a general *religious* perspective or be diluted by any culture in the world.⁵ This challenge invites us to develop skills in finding and expressing, in every situation and culture, what our faith and practice is and what it means to all peoples of the world. In order to do that, the Adventist Church must open itself to the teaching of the Bible and be driven by how it understands the world for which that teaching is meant, taking seriously that *its mission is the driving force in contextualization*.

As we seek to expand the Seventh-day Adventist witness to peoples rather than territories, we are moving our work into their collective cultures and individual minds. The conversion of a human heart is ultimately the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but, as Ellen White kept reminding us, this fruit is related to how wisely we work. She recognized that "the people of every country have their own peculiar, distinctive characteristics, and it is necessary that men should be wise in order that they may know how to adapt themselves to the peculiar ideas of the people and so introduce the truth that may do them good. They must be able to understand and meet their wants" (White 1923a:213).

Following Ellen White's counsel, we need to ask ourselves, How do we work "wisely" in contextualizing our mission? It means to strike a balance between being open and bold, while being careful and aware of the boundaries. I suggest we also need a sound theory of contextualization which we can apply in addressing practical problems. This is not only to avoid confusion caused by terminology,⁶ but also to understand what we are doing and to provide constructive guidelines.

How, then, can we define what we mean by a legitimate, biblical, Seventh-day Adventist concept of contextualization? It seems to me that the proposal of Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989) offers a useful starting point. In support of the thesis that contextualization is a necessity, they proceed from the following three presuppositions:

First, it is imperative that the Great Commission be fulfilled and the world be evangelized. Second, however world evangelization is defined, at the very least it entails an understandable hearing of the gospel. Third, if the gospel is to be understood, contextualization must be true to the complete authority and unadulterated message of the Bible on the one hand, and it must be related to the cultural, linguistic, and religious background of the respondents on the other (1989:xi).

Recognizing that there are legitimate and illegitimate, or biblical and unbiblical, forms of contextualization, the authors then present what they describe as authentic and relevant contextualization (1989:199 ff). With some slight adaptations and additions of my own, this concept would include four inter-related criteria for legitimate forms of contextualized mission, namely:

Context

Contextualization includes correctly understanding and relating to people in their historical and cultural context. This may be termed the *anthropological perspective* and it focuses on the culture (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:158-169).

Authenticity

Contextualization should have to do with God's revelation first of all, with faithfulness to the authority and content of the will of God as revealed in his creation, in man's conscience, and, especially, in his Son and his Word inspired by the Holy Spirit. This may be referred to as the *theological perspective*, placing the focus of interest on fundamental Christian beliefs (1989:144-157).

Effectiveness

Recognizing that, in and of itself, authenticity does not assure us that the message will be meaningful and persuasive to the intended receivers, contextualization must also include effective communication, i.e., our mission is completed only when the receivers have had a fair chance of *hearing and understanding* the message, on *their* terms, not ours. This might be called the *communication perspective*, focusing on the process of communication (1989:180-196).

Relevancy

As pointed out by Ellen White in my quotation from *Gospel Workers*, our mission is contextualized only when the message is presented in such a way that it meets the needs or wants of the recipients, i.e., their needs of *salvation* in a very broad sense. This means that we are looking at their needs of *understanding* in order to *find God*, not our needs of maintaining certain traditional standards. This may conveniently be referred to as the *hermeneutical perspective*, since it involves retrieving the supra-cultural validity of the gospel truth and making it cross-culturally communicable, meaningful, and acceptable (1989:170-179).

In light of this, I suggest that if we want to speak intelligently and legitimately about contextualized mission in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we need to include the four criteria of context, authenticity, effectiveness, and relevancy, or using another set of terms, cultural adaptation, biblical authority, communicative effectiveness, and relevance to salvific needs. This general definition also provides criteria for identifying the borders between an illegitimate adaptation to culture and fundamental biblical truth.

Many models of contextualization have suffered from an imbalanced view of the process of contextualization. Rather than giving due recognition to all four components, they have over-emphasized one or two. I therefore suggest, as a guideline, that we *include all the four components in a balanced way* when we deal with issues of contextualization and that we ensure that our ministerial training programs offer *balanced training* in all these areas.

The Challenge of People in Their Contexts

Contextualization deals with people in their contexts. The church needs to understand the nature of this challenge. I suggest it is helpful to distinguish between two types of context, namely, culture and language (1989:158). Culture may be defined as "a system of behavioral patterns which language interprets and realizes," but also as "the body of knowledge shared by the members of a group" (Gregory and Carroll 1978:78). That knowledge then takes the form of rules which govern the way in which individuals relate to and interpret their environment. The application of those rules produces culturally specific forms of behavior (including language behavior), patterns of communication, sets of values, and types of artifacts (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:158, Shaw 1988:4, 5).

Culture in this sense is part of a layer of contexts in which every individual lives. It has been noted that “contexts are nested within contexts, each one a function of the bigger context, and all . . . finding a place in the context of culture” (Firth 1964:70). In fact, it has been suggested that each individual has an internal network of the mind, containing everything the individual knows about his world, which is best conceived of as memory (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:167). As we see in figure 1, Layers of Context, this network includes culture, as an overarching determining context, then the social organization, and finally the perceived situation of the individual within his or her social and cultural environment.

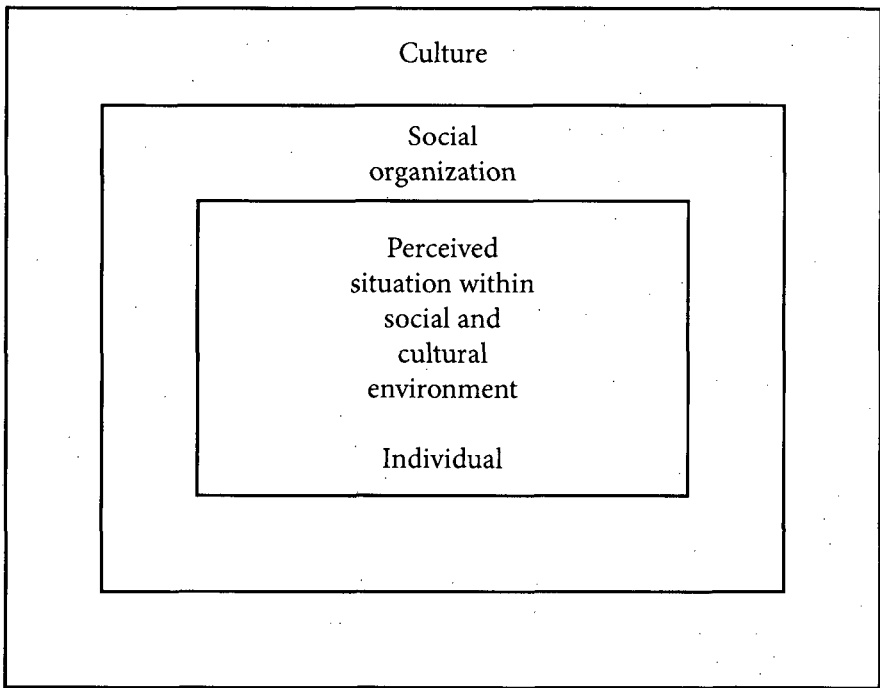


Figure 1: Layers of Context

Thus, for contextualization to take place, contextual overlap or match is achieved at one or all the levels included here. However, being the overarching and determining factor, the culture of a person or a group of people is the

primary dimension that needs to be affected by Adventist-Christian mission. An Adventist missionary working towards a person's conversion must therefore translate *universal* biblical meanings in order to *change* the non-Adventist culture into an Adventist shaped culture.

Very briefly, change can theoretically be achieved in three ways: (1) by affirming or clarifying the receiver's cultural concept, but *adding* to it the context of the Adventist-Christian worldview; (2) by expanding the receiver's cultural universe, letting it *develop* into the Adventist-Christian position; and (3) by contradicting the receiver's culture and *replacing* it by the Adventist-Christian view, which is something totally different.

In reality, we may often have to realize that no progress can ever be made unless a total conversion of the mind takes place, in the sense that a new biblical worldview replaces the old (see under Some Major Dangers of Contextualization below).

The *methods* of change include language, attitudes, actions, dress, and social settings of various sorts. Their *function* would be in one or more of the spheres in which contextualization normally occurs in the church, namely, *church life*, *ethics*, and *theology*, as defined by Jon Dybdahl: "*Church life* includes the realms of hymnody, architecture, worship style, ecclesiastical structure, methods of governance, decision-making, etc. *Ethics* involves the standards and moral life of the church. *Theology* includes doctrinal beliefs, statements of faith, and explanations about God" (1992:15).

While these areas are certainly inter-related, a valid guideline for us would be to evaluate an issue of contextualization according to its intended function in these three contexts. For example, the Bible seems to accept more flexibility for local diversity in the sphere of church life and the ethics of social behavior than in theology and the theology of ethics. This is basically due to the fact that the Bible is limited; it cannot include reference to every single detail of life and behavior, but works through *principles* that are to be applied in each cultural context, and the church therefore needs to have a procedure for how and by whom that work of application is to be carried out.

The perceived flexibility of the Bible on church life and ethical behavior may also be due to two further factors: First, as *written word*, the Bible is closer in nature to theology and the theology of ethics, since both use words as a medium of communication. The ethics of social *behavior* and *church life*, however, include attitudes and actions, buildings, art, and customs, where meaning is not encoded in words and where local non-verbal codes of meaning dominate.

Thus, the church cannot contextualize its message unless there is some sort of connection between the work of theology as an interpretation of the Bible texts at the *theoretical* level, and that of the *practical* application in the local culture, where local knowledge is fundamental.

Second, from an *ecclesiological* point of view, the responsibility in the church is divided, so that theology and the theology of ethics would be decided by the worldwide organization, the General Conference. The daily application of the ethics of social behavior and church life would, however, be the responsibility of the local church, led by the elected elder or conference employed pastor, where a larger degree of understanding of local cultural codes exists. The way in which the General Conference issues directions to the local church is by the *Church Manual*, and the local church ideally responds to its instruction by an attitude of loyalty.

The point that emerges here is that the issue of church organization and governance is essential for contextualization. As a guideline, I would suggest, therefore, that the unity and diversity of the church may best be preserved by (1) recognizing that the General Conference has the overarching responsibility for determining the core issues that constitute Adventism, but that this work needs to be carried out with flexibility and openness, through constant dialogue with Adventists in local cultures, and (2) that this interaction may be facilitated if the General Conference would focus on general *principles* of biblical theology and the theology of ethics that may then be applied locally in various forms of ethical behavior and church life. This approach would have an effect on the current shape of our *Church Manual* (1998).

Editor's note: This need was recognized by the General Conference in session in Toronto in 2000 when it was voted to re-organize the Church Manual and introduce a general section in each chapter with general principles followed by a more practical section where local unions would be allowed to suggest local practices.

The role of contextualization in mission offers such a mixture of possible approaches that in order to determine the boundaries we need to be very clear, first of all, about the *purpose* of contextualization. What, then, is the purpose of contextualization in mission?

Salvation As the Purpose of Contextualization

The need for contextualization invites the church to look carefully at its reason for existence. The church exists to bring God's salvation in Christ to all peoples. *Authentic and relevant* contextualization meets the *salvific needs* of all people. One of the best known examples of the concept of contextualization in the Bible is found in 1 Cor 9:19-23:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Note that the purpose of Paul's incarnational ministry is to "win as many as possible" (verse 19), or "save some" (verse 22) for the "sake of the gospel" (verse 23). Notice Jon Dybdahl's comments on this text: "to lose sight of this aim is to turn contextualization into an empty intellectual exercise" (1992:15).

An absolute boundary in contextualization would therefore be to refrain from reducing the biblical concept of salvation into something rather superficial in order to accommodate the local culture. Let me make two further remarks on this important point: First, the purpose of salvation implies more than proclamation; it includes the acceptance of Christ as Lord and a continuing process of growth as his disciples. A media ministry, for example, that only proclaims the message cannot fulfill our mission on its own; it needs a local church or local Adventist people who can lead seekers to accept Christ and then join their local fellowship in order to continue to grow. Contextualization is something to take seriously in this age of cross-cultural satellite evangelism.

Second, the purpose of salvation involves more than a universal notion of restoring the broken relationship between God and man. It also needs to take into account the boundless knowledge of God and the potential for growth which God has created in man. Thus, while Paul says in 1 Tim 2:4 that "God wants all men to be saved," he also says that God wants them "to come to a knowledge of the truth." While Paul says in 2 Tim 3:15-17 that the purpose of the Bible is "to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus," Paul also says that Scripture will "train for righteousness, so that the man of God

may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” And Christ in his Great Commission commanded us not only to make disciples and baptize people, but also to teach them everything he had commanded (Matt 28:18-20). Therefore, salvation includes *spiritual growth in communion with other believers*. Paul says in Eph 3:18-19 that he is praying that the believers “may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” The purpose of salvation is to know God, and Ellen White points out that this is “the most wonderful knowledge that men can have,” for “the knowledge of God’s love is the most effectual knowledge to obtain, that the character may be ennobled, refined and elevated” (1889:285, 286).

Recognizing that the Bible teaches that *salvation is a process of spiritual growth*, a contextualized mission project must ensure that such growth can take place after conversion. Therefore, somehow, all mission work should aim at providing an organized fellowship of believers as a necessary context for the convert.

At this point, it is proper to remind ourselves of Ellen White’s extraordinary formulation of the mission statement for the Church: “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God” (1911:9).

This wide-ranging definition of the church and its mission suggests that contextualized ministry needs to include more than just proclamation, acceptance of Christ, a transformed life of good deeds, discipling, and growth in the fellowship of the church. It also implies a special calling to serve as a collective community *where the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ are shared*, a community *growing towards the final and full display of the love of God*, a community *with an eschatological and prophetic identity*.

These observations will have a bearing on specific issues raised by some contextualized mission projects, namely those of baptism and membership, the identity of the group of believers and their relation to the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. We will come back to this in a later section.

The Uniqueness of Adventist Faith and Praxis

The Issue of Other Religions

The concept of salvation might be assigned various shifts of meaning by different religions. Where is the exclusiveness of the Seventh-day Adventist Christian concept? Where are the absolute boundaries against other religions?

Seventh-day Adventist mission will, as a rule, affect the entire life of a person. This is a result of our biblical view of man as a whole, as a being where mental, spiritual, physical, and social dimensions interact. Another way of describing this is to apply a model of man in his cultural context.

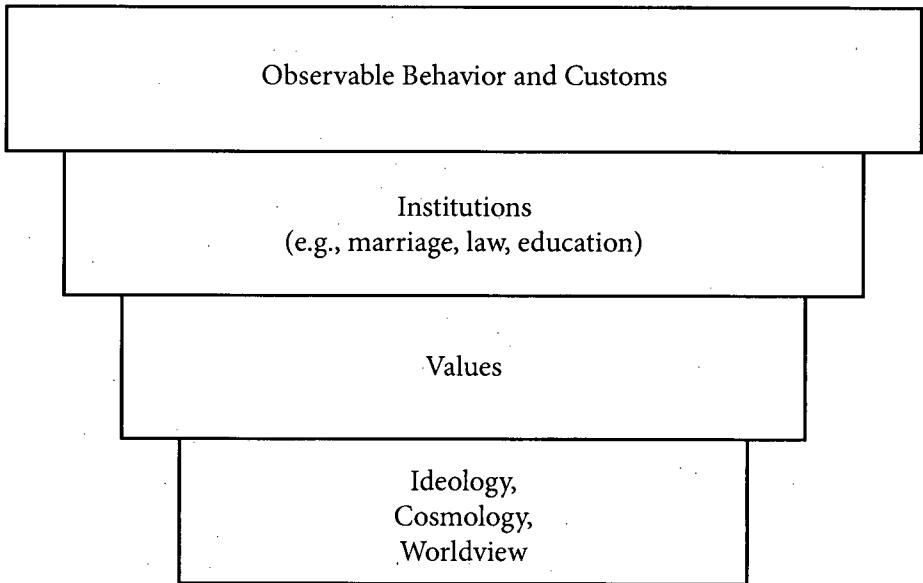


Figure 2: Layers of Culture

In the model of culture provided in figure 2, Layers of Culture, we see the areas of an individual's culture that are being directly affected. There is the outer, observable layer of behavior and customs, then institutions such as marriage,

law, and education, then values governing ethical norms and tastes, and finally, the underlying layer of “ideology, cosmology and world view” (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:53). It is often in this latter area that conversion takes place, and that is what contextualized mission needs to target and come to grips with. The fact that the deepest layer is often part of a religious or political system of thought makes this a challenging task. Relating to culture is largely a matter of relating to non-Christian worldviews.

From a biblical perspective, we would see the world, its cultures, and religions as the area of a great battle between the forces of God and Satan. Though the outcome is guaranteed by virtue of God’s sovereignty, ultimate triumph does not mitigate the present struggle. Being created by God, man reflects his image, but, as a result of the fall, man also is corrupted by sin. Supra-cultural messages and phenomena invade the world, but they emanate from God or Satan and are therefore sometimes divine, sometimes demonic. Relating to culture is in this perspective an ethical decision for or against God.

Thus, while the church may relate to other religions in various ways, it must always avoid two dangers: “The fear of irrelevance if contextualization is not attempted, and the fear of compromise and syncretism if it is taken too far” (1989:55). The fear of irrelevance emerges from our obedience to the Great Commission and the Three Angels’ Messages, and the fear of compromise and syncretism emerges from our obedience to the truth and the commandments of God.

Christians tend to take one of four approaches to other faiths: exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and relativism. This is how Russell Staples described these approaches in the November issue of *Ministry*, 1992: *Exclusivists* maintain that the central claims of Christianity are uniquely true and that the claims of other religions are to be rejected when these are in conflict with Christianity and its major tenets. *Inclusivists* affirm the uniqueness of Jesus Christ on the one hand and on the other the possibility of God’s saving activity in other religions. *Pluralists* are prepared to abandon the claims of Christianity to exclusive truth or uniqueness in favor of a willingness to recognize truth and the saving activity of God in all religions, with Christ being one of the great figures God has used to call people to faithfulness. *Relativists* tend to be agnostic. They recognize no exclusive truth, and as such are diametrically opposed to pluralists who accept the truth claims of religion and advocate a certain kind of missionary activity.

I agree with Russell Staples that “a moderate exclusivist position is most compatible with the Adventist sense of identity and mission” (1992:11, 13). As an absolute fundamental of our faith, we must therefore consider *the plan of salvation* (in its objective/historical and subjective/personal forms) in the context of *the great controversy*. However, the exclusivist position does not exclude a balanced view. Ellen White and the apostle Paul provide guidelines for a degree of flexibility. Ellen White states two important things: first, that the Holy Spirit may work directly on the heart of those who have not heard the gospel; second, that God will judge people according to the light they have. She says:

Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God (White 1940:638).

Similarly, she says:

God’s test of the heathen, who have not the light, and of those living where the knowledge of truth and light has been abundant, is altogether different. He accepts from those in heathen lands a phase of righteousness which does not satisfy Him when offered by those of Christian lands. He does not require much where much has not been bestowed (White 1899).

It seems to me that these statements give room for a degree of flexibility in applying the exclusivist claim to other religions in contextualized ministries. However, I believe it is also clear that we must guard ourselves against devising ready-made theological systems applied in models of contextualization that, so to speak, *a priori* defers from offering the full salvation and the full knowledge that God has revealed in the Bible simply because the missionary does not believe that the people in their culture can take it. Ellen White points out that “millions upon millions have never so much as heard of God or of His love revealed in Christ. It is their right to receive this knowledge” (1903:262). Rather than merely accepting the obstacles of the foreign religion or culture, we need to develop methods of contextualization that gradually brings the people to a fuller knowledge. This ongoing process of teaching may include: (1) helping people to be critical of their hidden assumptions and the ideologies they have learned from their culture; (2) translating the Christian message by the use of

paraphrase rather than too literal renderings; and (3) commenting and teaching by illustrations that are compatible with the local culture.

At this point, a question presents itself, What are the boundaries for how far we should go in adapting our message to a non-Christian religion? There is a fascinating answer to this in the Bible. As a rule, the easiest and most efficient method for the apostle Paul was to go to the synagogue and use the Scriptures and Jewish tradition to proclaim Christ. It worked quite well. In particular, the Hellenistic Jews, "those who feared God," proved to be most receptive to the gospel. They had an internal conceptual world which enabled them to "hear and understand" the word. But not so the learned Greeks in the meeting of the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16-33)!

How would these Greeks understand the Word of God? By their culture and views they were extremely distant from the proclamation of the gospel. No Old Testament Scriptures, no Jewish tradition, no expectation for Messiah, no eschatology, no belief in the resurrection, but a rich Greek pagan tradition. Paul had to preach the gospel in a Greek "pagan" way. His boldness leaves me impressed.

First, he established a good relationship with the Athenians in order to build trust. Without trust, people will not hear our proclamation. Paul stood up and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious" (Acts 17:22).

Then he made a connection with idolatry by referring to an altar and the inscription "to an unknown God." There is not a word of criticism or judgment against idolatry here in the biblical story. In fact, from the Athenian polytheism and false concepts of God, Paul led the Greeks towards the true God. But he was forced to enter into the listeners' ground, to speak on their terms, if he wanted to be understood and save them. He had to disregard his own knowledge and operate at the level of the receivers. Nobody would accuse Paul of idolatry or apostasy, although in his proclamation he not only refers to altars and inscriptions of idols, but he also quotes a piece of Greek pagan poetry, written by the Stoic poet Aratos (310-240 B.C.), taken from a context where the words are referring to the pagan god Zeus. Thus, using the conceptual world of the recipients, no matter how abominable it definitely was to the pious Paul, he nevertheless argues in their conceptual framework in order to make them hear and understand the word of God.

But notice that Paul ultimately does not hide his purpose, which is the message of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:31), although he knew that many

would reject it. The *purpose* of contextualization must be clear, namely, that of salvation for all peoples; but the core *facts* of salvation must be equally clear, namely what God has done for humanity in Jesus Christ. Let me conclude this section by suggesting three guidelines for contextualization, drawing on Paul's approach.

First, we may use names and concepts of god in other religions, if we re-interpret them to conform to the biblical view of God.

Second, we may use and quote the writings of other cultures and religions, if we re-interpret them according to the biblical worldview.

Third, in mission dialogue we build trust by establishing a common ground with the receivers, but we must proceed into biblical truth when the opportunity comes as the Spirit guides us, especially concerning what God has done in Jesus Christ, even though the Christ event may be a totally foreign concept to our audience.

Paul and the early Christians preached Christ as crucified and resurrected unto a world that perceived this message to be folly: "But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:23-24).

We must not allow the recipient culture or faith to delay the process of sharing truth to such an extent that we avoid sharing the central tenet of the Adventist Christian faith that Christ died for us and that God has defeated sin and evil by resurrecting him from the dead. If we do, the danger of a syncretistic faith taking root would be imminent.

The Issue of Hermeneutics

Christian contextualization is a process of communication, in which the gospel is shared in a way that is faithful to God's revelation in the Bible while being meaningful to receivers in their cultural and existential contexts. It has been pointed out that "contextualization is both verbal and non-verbal and has to do with theologizing; Bible translation, interpretation, and application; incarnational lifestyle; evangelism; Christian instruction; church planting and growth; church organization; worship style—indeed with all of those activities involved in carrying out the Great Commission" (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:200).

What is involved here is a *trialogue*, i.e., “an ongoing three-way conversation among the Bible, the missionary, and the missionized” (Dybdahl 1992:16). Some of this interaction is displayed in figure 3, Contextualization—A Three-Culture Model as proposed by Eugene Nida (1960 in Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:200). The triad encompasses a process of revelation, interpretation, and application throughout which a *continuity of meaning* is traced. This continuity is essential in order to protect the biblical message from distortion. It is maintained by constant faithfulness to the authoritative biblical text and an exercise of great hermeneutical skills.

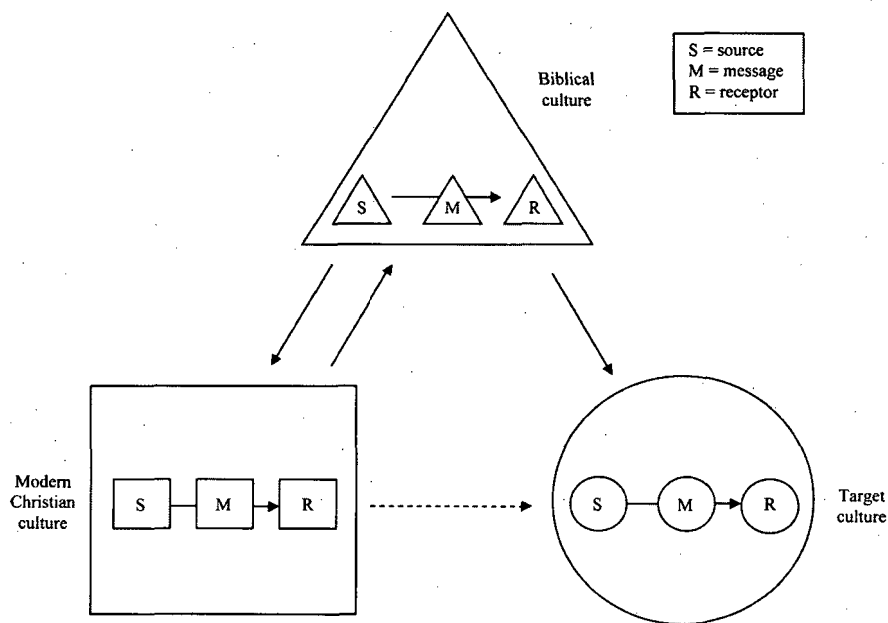


Figure 3: Contextualization – A Three-Culture Model

The need for a viable hermeneutical model is all the more important in view of what is involved in communicating the Christian faith to respondents in other cultures. It has been argued by experts on contextualization that all messages must pass through the following seven-dimension grid as shown in figure 4, Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Communication.

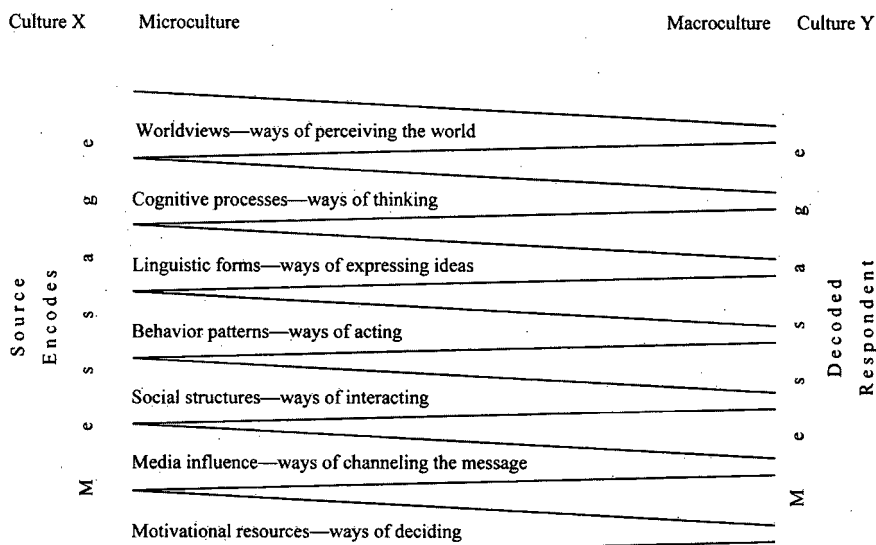


Figure 4: Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Communication

The many different ways in which these dimensions may be handled in contextualization are too complex to illustrate here. The point is that, whatever the biblical idea or principle to be contextualized may be, it needs to be shared through a complex hermeneutical process involving exegesis of the biblical *revelation* in its cultural context, *interpretation* by the contextualizer in his or her cultural context, and *application* to the mind of the receiver in his or her cultural context, and all of this being done in contextual, authentic, effective, and relevant ways in the spheres of theology, ethics, or church life, and being channeled through a complex set of at least seven cross-cultural dimensions. This is certainly very difficult, but nevertheless a work that must be done. Therefore, great flexibility and skill, and a prayerful commitment to the power of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the church at large, would be necessary.

To help the interpreter preserve the continuity of meaning, I suggest that the following guidelines would apply: (1) faithfulness to the authority of the Bible; (2) faithfulness to the message and mission of God's worldwide remnant church and an aim to safeguard its unity and fellowship while allowing for a cultural diversity; (3) a hermeneutical skill that enables one to trace a continuity of meaning from the Bible to the missionary's own cultural context, and

then on to the recipient culture; (4) extensive knowledge and understanding of the recipient culture, even empathy with it, which is sometimes achieved only by living it; and (5) applying the universal message of Christian love, interpersonal relations, and "the truth as it is in Jesus" (see Ellen White's concept of "incarnational ministry" below). This is not possible to do in an absolute or once and for all manner. It requires practice, experience, and a process of trial and error. The church needs to be open to this, so that it does not limit creativity and fresh ideas. At the same time, the practitioner needs to be loyal and willing to listen to the values and concerns of the church at large.

Translating Truth into Culture

From among the existing models of contextualization (Bevans 1992), the translational model seems best adapted for the way our church perceives truth. Its key presupposition is that the essential message of Christianity is supra-cultural. A basic distinction is made between the kernel of the gospel core and the disposable cultural husk. This is, then, the proper context for talking about the boundaries of contextualization, i.e., the boundaries between fundamental beliefs and culture.

Any translation process is likely to bring a danger of distortion, because cultures and languages differ. While we may simplify matters by saying that language consists of form and content and that translation consists in preserving the content and changing the form, all who have been involved in Bible translation or a contextualized ministry know that, in reality, it is much more complicated. Languages and cultures differ not only on the surface, but in semantic or conceptual deep structures of meaning, in associative or emotive meanings, in functional rules of language behavior, in social contexts, and in the overarching worldview that determines the fundamental features of a culture.

This is, therefore, a vast topic and I can only suggest a couple of general guidelines. First, as in all Bible translation, some distortion is unavoidable;⁷ the essential thing is to *guard the theological fundamentals*, as defined in sections 2 and 9 of this paper.

Second, having identified a *continuity of meaning* from the Bible, across one's own culture and then on to the recipient culture, a contextualizer will use cross-cultural universals, i.e., concepts, statements, and principles that correspond. The new form will, however, carry added and sometimes non-bib-

lical connotations embedded in the receiving culture. In order to safeguard the biblical message against improper distortion in this connection, one would recommend (a) constant communication and prayerful dialogue in a congregational context, (b) a gradual broadening of the receiver's knowledge of the biblical worldview, and (c) non-verbal communication, such as actions and attitudes, pictures and images.

Third, when the receiver's culture does not have any corresponding element for a biblical concept or principle, i.e., when a gap occurs, material that is as similar as possible may be used, and this needs to be accompanied by the same safeguards as suggested under point two above.

The practical problems facing the translation process as a result of cultural diversity are immeasurable. Some of these problems relate to models of evangelism which we set up, and where we have a choice to make. I guess that is what we should be discussing first of all today. I admit, however, that my knowledge is very limited about such models in our church. In the Trans-European Division, we are at present running contextualized projects in the secular Western culture, we are developing plans for Islamic cultures, and we dream of doing something for Jews in Israel and Europe. The representatives here from the various Global Mission Study Centers could probably tell us more about their experiences and plans in the discussion that is about to follow.

Other issues arise from millions of everyday life situations in which, on first sight, biblical principles seem to conflict with the surrounding cultural values, but where a closer look might reveal that the conflict is between two or more *biblical* principles. Let me use an example.

A young mother and wife in India became a Christian, while her family remained Hindu. Being responsible for the household, it was her duty to make the evening offerings of food and incense to Vasavi Kanyaka, the god worshipped by the family. The welfare and happiness of the entire family is believed to depend on this act of worship. While her husband is tolerant towards various religions and worship of various gods, he now asks her, "How can your God forbid us to worship our gods?"

What advice do we give her? One way is to refuse in obedience to the literal meaning of the first and second commandments of not worshipping idols which will lead to separation from her husband, child, and family, and her being thrown out of her village. Being cut off from her social context, she would probably not survive and would certainly have very limited possibilities of making a Christian witness in her community.

Another way is to *redefine* the act of offering for herself, abolishing the idea of an offering to a pagan god but seeing it purely as an expression of love and loyalty to her husband, being void of religious meaning in order to win his confidence and eventually win him for Christ (Hiebert and Hiebert 1987:34-37). She could also be advised to seek to change the objective of the offering, so that, rather than being directed to a pagan god, it could be directed to Christ. Following the second solution, however, it would seem to be an absolute boundary that we are not accepting a Hindu offering as part of Christian faith, but that there is an intentional plan to achieve aims compatible with biblical, Christian faith. To some extent, this course of action might nevertheless result in the incorporation of originally Hindu religious customs being reinterpreted in accordance with our biblical faith.

Some of the objections to this tolerance of an originally Hindu practice may derive from the fact that it is unfamiliar and strange to our Western eyes. However, we should be aware of the fact that even in Western Adventism various examples of similar processes exist, although we have become blind to them. Note, for example, the names of pagan gods for the days of the week in Germanic languages including English (Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday contain the names of the gods Oden, Thor, and Freja in ancient Nordic mythology); the commonly accepted practice of joining hands in prayer which originally derives from pagan Gothic customs; the use of the originally pagan Christmas tree; the use of the originally Roman wedding bands; the Swedish *Lucia* celebration on December 13; and the Danish national anthem, by which Seventh-day Adventists are invited to use the pagan expression "the hall of *Freja*" for their country (*Freja* being the fertility god in Nordic mythology). Adventists, however, and in some cases this would include Ellen White, have reinterpreted ancient pagan customs to express Christian faith. It seems that, in these cases, Paul's principle of "living as a Jew among Jews and a Greek among Greeks in order to save some" has been applied by the church both globally and nationally. It needs to be recognized, however, that Adventists tend to view these matters very differently, and there is little consensus on what is permissible and what not. I believe this issue would require more extensive study and that our church members everywhere would benefit from a balanced biblical teaching on how to perceive these things.

Another example relates to models of contextualization in Islamic countries. A writer in *Ministry* notes that "Adventist communities existing in Muslim countries have real problems identifying themselves with local cultures,"

and the effects are a very minimal growth of the church in Islamic countries. He suggests changes in church life and worship styles, including introducing local themes in Sabbath School, Arabic music and singing, adapting to Muslim sacrar architectural style, making churches into houses of prayer, and introducing personal dress that is more similar to local customs. The title of the article bears the provocative title: "Would you worship God in a mosque?" (Dabrowski 1995:10, 11).

This is, of course, a very real challenge. Similar examples could be given from the Jewish context. Thousands of Messianic Jews are becoming Christians in Israel and across the world through Jewish contextualized ministries, and there are increasing examples of the same process in Adventism. Planting Adventist synagogues is becoming a goal for our mission.

The church may address these issues by adopting the following guideline: A contextualized local Seventh-day Adventist Church could use forms and customs from the local culture in its church life if the clear teaching of the Bible does not forbid it, if it has a clear purpose to foster genuine Seventh-day Adventist and biblical faith, if it is acceptable to the local church (congregation and mission/union conference), and if the General Conference has in principle accepted that such deviations from the *Church Manual* can be made without jeopardizing the worldwide unity of the Church.

Universal Actions and Attitudes

Actions and attitudes are powerful communicators in contextualization, sometimes being more efficient than words. Valuable insights may be gained from the incarnational ministry described by Ellen White:

In laboring in a new field, do not think it your duty to say at once to the people, We are Seventh-day Adventists; we believe that the seventh day is the Sabbath; we believe in the non-immortality of the soul. This would often erect a formidable barrier between you and those you wish to reach. Speak to them, as you have opportunity, upon points of doctrine on which you can agree. Dwell on the necessity of practical godliness. Give them evidence that you are a Christian, desiring peace, and that you love their souls. Let them see that you are conscientious. Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time enough for doctrines. Let the heart be won, the soil prepared, and then sow the seed, presenting in love the truth as it is in Jesus (White 1948a:119, 120).

The following guidelines for an Adventist contextualized ministry can be drawn from the above quotation: (1) speak upon points on which you can

agree, (2) make pleasant interpersonal relations the key, (3) allow for time to pass and growth to take place, first preparing the soil, (4) let the seed sown be the "truth as it is in Jesus," and (5) the work of soul-winning is primarily a work of Christian love.

As an illustration of the importance of this method, notice the following comments: "Despite more than a decade in Asia and the Middle East, I have yet to meet a Muslim who has been convinced and persuaded by the quality of our arguments or by the content of our knowledge, to follow the Jesus of the Gospels. Rather, that transformation has only ever been born out of the miracles of love transplanted into theology, life and witness by the power for the Holy Spirit in our lives" (Penman in Schantz 1993:164).

Church Identity and Baptism

The Christian mission of making disciples of all peoples has two related purposes based on the wording of the Great Commission in Matt 28:18-20: One is to lead people to Christ by the experience of conversion and baptism; the other is to lead them into a functional church culture, where they are being taught to keep everything Christ has commanded, and in which they may grow in their faith and discipleship, serving as part of the world fellowship of Seventh-day Adventist believers (see section 3 above).

The question we need to ask is whether both steps are taken at the same time, *before baptism*, or whether baptism is a confirmation of the experience of a personal conversion to Christ as Savior based on an acceptance of a more general doctrinal teaching, which is then, *after baptism*, gradually deepened through participation in church life and spiritual growth. It is clear to all of us what the *Church Manual* currently says concerning "thorough instruction prior to baptism," but I am putting to you the question if the concept of "thorough" needs to be adapted to different cultures. Perhaps in some places, an early baptism followed by a long time of deepened study of the truth might be considered as a practical way of doing mission.

There are, as you all know, biblical examples of baptism immediately following upon the confession of faith in Christ, for example, the three thousand Jews from various cultures on the Day of Pentecost according to Acts 2, the Ethiopian in Acts 8, and even the Hellenist Cornelius with all his household in Acts 10. The general impression in the book of Acts is that baptism was performed immediately after confession in Jesus as Messiah, that some knowledge

was required for this to happen, and that further instruction was then left to the congregation and the church fellowship. The dual role of the Holy Scriptures according to 2 Tim 3:15-17 seems to be on one hand to “make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (leading to baptism?), and on the other to be “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (in the life of the church fellowship?).

Today, if the Church’s mission is to achieve a complete change of an individual’s worldview, values, institutional patterns, and outward behavior and customs *prior to baptism*, this will prolong the process of conversion and baptismal instruction. And a long time of preparation for baptism becomes a matter of concern in contexts where the culture itself raises obstacles to Christian mission.

In secular parts of Europe “successful” evangelists now work up to seven years to lead an individual to a decision, simply due to a culture that provides no faith in God, no biblical knowledge, and that predisposes people against making lasting commitments that govern their life values and behavior. In this case, the missionary has no choice. But in an Islamic context, where brotherhood and belonging often functions as conditions for in-depth study of the Bible, an early baptism after confession of faith in *Issa al Masih* followed by long-term instruction to establish “obedience to everything that Christ has commanded his disciples” may function as a help to fulfill the Great Commission as a whole.

The alternative model to what we normally do in Western churches, a model that reckons with a successive spiritual growth in the life of the believer, places a greater responsibility on the Church to provide a functional program of spiritual nurture. The Church may avoid the threat of apostasies resulting from baptizing people too soon if it constantly cares for their spiritual needs. The Adventist World Church Survey in 1993 indicated, however, that we need to do better in this area, otherwise apostasies will increase.

Editor’s note: At the Annual Council in 2005 this concern was emphasized by Elder Paulsen and a program was voted that would encourage the Adventist Church to address this need.

It is difficult to suggest any firm principles for this type of issue at this stage. If we are not willing to change our traditional view of a thorough prepara-

tion for baptism, it may be a possibility, in some specific mission projects, to introduce *levels or degrees of membership* to provide for the need of fellowship and a sense of belonging as people continue to grow. In the case of adding a new member to an existing church fellowship, it would, however, be a vital prerequisite that the existing congregation is able to accept the new member. In the case of a newly planted church, there may be greater freedom in terms of what the other members expect, but it would also be more important in that situation to ensure that the new members are given a sense of belonging to the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. If that element proves an obstacle to successful growth, *the aim of preserving a Seventh-day Adventist identity should not be given up*. We need to safeguard the identity of each member as belonging to the global community of God's people. I believe the theological reasons for this position were adequately presented in section 3 above.

Using the Bible As a Standard

The importance of using the Bible as the authoritative source of truth and safeguard against syncretism has been repeated in the paper several times. The contextualizer needs to be constantly on guard to faithfully reflect the meaning of the biblical text, needs to establish the truth that has been revealed by defining what the text *says* (revelation), needs to understand what it *means* (interpretation), and needs to *apply* it to receivers in their cultural context (application). This is a hermeneutical task which calls for skills, wisdom, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Criteria for Using the Bible as a Standard for Contextualization

The Authoritative Word of God

Our view of the Bible as "the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration," in which "God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation," which is "the infallible revelation of God's will," and which is "the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history."⁸

The Bible As a Whole

The Bible comprises the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments as a whole. Fundamental truth is that which is supported by the Bible as a whole. The writings of Ellen White help us understand the Bible and increase our knowledge of biblical truth.

Christ Being the Center of the Bible

Truth being “the truth as it is in Jesus.”⁹ The Bible is “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). This would be the core belief which should serve as an interpretive model for understanding the Bible as a unity.¹⁰ It is based on biblical teaching, for example, in 1 Col 1:25, where Paul describes Christ as “the word of God in its fullness.” Ellen White states that “every true doctrine makes Christ the center, every precept receives force from His words” (1948b:54).

Text Explaining Text in the Context of Each Bible Book As a Whole

The basic method of reading, understanding, and interpreting the Bible is to let text explain text, but only after carefully determining the meaning of each text from the context of the individual book as a whole.

Faith in Jesus and Biblical Instruction

The Bible reveals missionary events when the knowledge necessary to become baptized is the acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Savior, i.e., when the knowledge of a systematic view of the Bible is kept pending (Acts 8:26-40).

Specific Issues Concerning Contextualization

First, the biblical core of beliefs that constitute Adventism and provide the unifying factors within our diversity would be the Fundamental Beliefs, or, in some instances, the Baptismal Vows. I am not prepared to suggest reductions beyond that. Certainly, when we translate our beliefs into another language, a degree of contextualization does take place. But to deliberately exclude elements on which the church has united itself would seem to be very unwise. It seems more fruitful to look at ways and methods by which we can teach converts, so that, over time, truth surfaces in their understanding.

Second, it can be argued that, while the authoritative teaching of the Bible always defines the absolute boundaries for any kind of contextualized mission by representatives of our church, the Bible also provides a certain flexibility. The Adventist Church states in the preamble to its current list of Fundamental Beliefs that we accept the Bible as our only creed, and that our beliefs reflect our understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture which are open to *revision* as we are led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth.

The foundations for this flexibility are several, namely, our view of the boundless nature of God and of our knowledge of him; the nature of the inspiration of the Scriptures; and a certain understanding of the thought structure of language exemplified in the Bible. As we all know, Adventists believe not only that the truth about God and the love of Christ are "immeasurable,"¹¹ but also that what is revealed in the Bible is sufficient for our salvation. We believe in the inspiration of the Bible authors and their thoughts rather than their literal words. We understand that different biblical statements may say the same thing, or elaborate and expand on the same theme, although different words are used. Thus, it is entirely possible to propose succinctly worded concepts or propositions that sum up the entire message of the Bible, and, conversely, that may be expanded to account for all the writings of the Bible.¹² The choice of statement may be made in view of context, intended receiver, and purpose.

In other words, there is a flexibility in terms of how we word the core truths of the Bible. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Adventist Church may revise its understanding of those core truths. As we can see in the writings of Ellen White, such change may be of three types: (1) clarification, (2) progressive development, and (3) contradiction or reversal (Knight 1993:10-15).

It must, however, be made clear that an absolute boundary in this connection, at least for employees of the church, is that no adaptation of our core beliefs should be made *individually* in the process of contextualization. Dialogue with the church as a *hermeneutical community* is necessary (Dybdahl 1992:16). Individual decisions are seldom good ones; the Bible encourages us to seek counsel from each other. The church is a body and we are to gain divine wisdom from each other's experiences. When the Holy Spirit speaks to all or many, the weight of the interpretation increases.

Third, there are attempts by some to contextualize the Bible in non-Christian traditions. Some make it clear; others do not. However, I would agree that "contextualizations (and translations and interpretations) that grow out of a

view of Scripture in accord with the revelational epistemology of Shintoism, Hinduism, and Islam, or some faith other than historic Christianity, will have sacrificed biblical authority by defining that authority in terms more suitable to the Kojiki, the Upanishads, the Koran, or some other understanding of revelation. This is dangerous and can be disastrous" (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:139).

That is not to say that the Qur'an could not be used in an Adventist contextualized ministry in an Islamic country. As the apostle Paul quoted pagan Greek writings when preaching to Greeks, we should be open to using other religions' holy writings as we lead people to wider understanding. Our usage must, however, be selective and measured by the Bible, since there must be no confusion over the unique inspiration and authority of the Bible. An absolute boundary would be for us not to accept the divine inspiration of the Qur'an as a whole, but accepting that it may contain elements of truth.

A fourth area of concern is the importance of biblical theology to change the worldview of the receivers. Worldview is the basic element of a receiver's culturally conditioned mindset, and that is where conversion takes place. Worldview may be characterized as "the structure of the universe as the people of a culture see it or 'know it to be,'" (Robert Redfield as quoted in Hesselgraves and Rommen 1989:212). Worldview governs life and colors and shapes all experiences. Therefore, if a worldview that has not been shaped by Christian thought is not transformed into a biblically shaped one, even though a person may embrace certain truths of the gospel, those truths will be interpreted from a non-Christian perspective. Consciously or unconsciously that person will tend to fashion a syncretistic worldview.

The way to supplant non-Christian worldviews with a Christian worldview is to replace false stories with the true story *as it is unfolded in the Bible* (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:214). It seems to me to be an absolute boundary in contextualization that we do not supplant a worldview by removing pieces from the false stories and replacing them with pieces from the true story. The truth of the pieces of the Christian story will make sense only in the context of the larger biblical story, which, somehow, must be shared with the receivers. This will also mean, however, that biblical theology from the source of the text itself must generally be favored over against any secondary systematization of the biblical message. With our longstanding confession as Adventists that "the Bible is our only creed," we should not have difficulties in implementing this

principle. The Bible must have the primary place, because it is "the way God communicated his truth to mankind."¹³

Some Major Dangers of Contextualization

Though contextualization is a necessity, dangers are involved. The best way to handle them is to be aware of them and constantly seek to control them. The first major danger is *superficiality*, arising from ignorance or insensitivity in the process of contextualization (Dybdahl 1992:16). A few outward forms are changed, but there is never any deep awareness of the receivers' values and culture.

Jon Dybdahl describes a case to illustrate this: "The few who become Christians do so by converting to the ways of the missionary, thus becoming strangers in their own land and ill-fitted to reach their own people." As a result, "the eternally relevant gospel is perceived as irrelevant, not on the basis of what it really is, but on the basis of the cultural baggage contained in its presentation." This danger can only be avoided by a constant searching for a clearer understanding of the genuine gospel and how it is best conveyed in each situation, at each point in time, and to each person in his or her cultural context.

The second major danger is *syncretism*, i.e., the mixing of divergent beliefs that takes place when contextualization has gone too far and has lost its faithfulness to the Bible and Christian principles. Both form and meaning have been incorporated from the local culture, and the essence of Christianity is lost.

An example in the ethical sphere is the genocidal behavior of Christians in Rwanda. Another example in the theological sphere is the introduction of modern science or human reason as an authority above the Bible. Instead of Christianity using the vehicle of culture to communicate its message, culture takes over Christianity, using the faith for its own aims. The safeguarding guideline here is, of course, to exercise faithfulness to the authority of the Bible as a standard for faith and praxis.

The third major danger is loss of Seventh-day Adventist *identity*. The local culture may not provide the necessary tools for making the full Seventh-day Adventist message contextualized in a relevant and effective way (while being both contextual and authentic). The loss of some vital elements characterizing the church may develop into either an underground church or a church that lives its life separately from the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. To overcome this danger, certain basic criteria for Seventh-day Adventist contex-

tualization would need to be developed, possibly by a deep study of the form and content of the baptismal vow and the form of organization.

Summary of Guidelines

Presently, the Adventist Church does not have guidelines for the boundaries of contextualization in mission. Jon Dybdahl made an initial step in his 1992 article in *Ministry*¹⁴ by mentioning a number of safeguards. Below I submit the following list of possible guidelines for our discussion.

General Approach to Contextualization

Love for Lost People

Christ's mission of salvation must be the driving force in contextualization. It is not based only on our *obedience* to Christ, but first and foremost on our genuine and unselfish *love* for lost people. Lost people matter to God and therefore they matter to us.

Spiritual Movement and Organized Church

The church needs to keep in mind the *practical realities* of its mission to the peoples of the world. Adventist contextualizers need to keep in mind that they represent a dynamic *movement* to reach the world's unreached, in which innovation and change led by the Holy Spirit is needed as well as an organized *church*, which, under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit, seeks to maintain the stability and unity of God's people.

Balanced Contextualization

We need a *balanced view* of contextualization, including the components of context, authenticity, efficiency, and relevance. Ministerial training programs need to offer balanced training in all these areas.

Various Areas of Contextualization

Contextualization occurs within the church in the spheres of *theology, ethics, and church life*. Due to the nature of the Bible as a written word and the nature of Seventh-day Adventist Church governance, there would seem to be more flexibility in contextualization related to ethics of social behavior and church life, which includes attitudes, actions, buildings, music, aesthetics, and local forms of action, and which are subject to local church decision.

Adventism As Both Global and Local Church

The unity and diversity of the Adventist Church may be balanced by an *interaction* between the General Conference, where the ultimate responsibility for determining the core issues that constitute Adventism lies, and Adventism in local cultures. This interaction may be both flexible and unifying if the General Conference focuses on general *principles* of biblical theology and the theology of ethics, which may then be applied locally in various forms in social behavior and church life. This approach would have an effect on the current shape of our *Church Manual*.

Salvation As the Purpose of Contextualization

The Purpose

The *purpose* of all contextualization in mission must be driven by the full biblical concept of salvation.

The Full Implications of Salvation

One must refrain from reducing the biblical concept of salvation into something rather superficial in order to accommodate the local culture.

Experience of Salvation and Church Fellowship

The purpose of salvation is to know God and includes *growth in communion with other believers*. Salvation is a process of spiritual growth, and a contextualized mission project must ensure that such growth can take place after the conversion. Therefore, somehow all mission work should aim at providing an organized fellowship of believers as a context for the convert.

The Collective, Eschatological, and Prophetic Identity of the Church

The biblical nature of the church and its mission suggests that contextualized ministries should be driven by a special calling to serve as a collective community where the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ are shared, a community growing towards the final and full display of the love of God; a community that has an *eschatological and prophetic identity*.

The Uniqueness of Our Faith

Plan of Salvation in the Great Controversy

The mental and cultural area of ideology, cosmology, and worldview is often where conversion takes place, and that is what contextualized mission needs to target, trying to *replace non-Christian worldviews with a biblically shaped worldview*. The worldview inherent in the *plan of salvation* (historical and personal) in the context of the great controversy provides an absolute core of belief in contextualization.

Relation to God Without Knowledge of Adventism

Some *flexibility* exists in how we understand non-Christian peoples' *relation to God*: the Holy Spirit may work directly on their hearts although they have not heard the gospel, and God will judge them according to the light they have.

The Goal Is to Lead Converts to a Full Knowledge of the Truth

We must guard ourselves against models in contextualization that, so to speak, *a priori* defer from offering full salvation and the full knowledge that God has revealed in the Bible, simply because the missionary does not believe that the people in their culture are ready for it. A process of teaching should gradually bring the people to a fuller knowledge.

Adaptation to Other Faiths Versus Confronting Other Faiths With the Gospel

There is biblical support for a degree of adaptation of our message to non-Christian religions. We may use names and concepts of god in other religions as a bridge if we reinterpret them to conform to the biblical view of God. We may use and quote the writings of other religions if we reinterpret them according to the Bible. We may establish a common ground and win confidence in various ways including being culturally compatible with those whom we seek to reach. However, ultimately, at the right time, we must be ready to proceed into biblical truth, especially as far as Jesus Christ and the gospel is concerned, even though it may be a totally foreign concept to our audience. The foreignness of the gospel must not be used as an excuse for not presenting it in its fullness.

Communication and Hermeneutics

Using Universals

Contextualizers seek to use universals in concepts and meanings, which should not be distorted by the recipient's culture, social organization, and perceived situation. This is done by translating the biblical message culturally into the receiver's culture, using words as well as personal actions and attitudes.

Guidelines for Protecting Bible Truth

In order to safeguard the absolutes of biblical truth and to preserve the continuity of meaning, the following guidelines may be helpful: (a) faithfulness to the authority of the Bible; (b) faithfulness to the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and an aim to safeguard its unity; (c) hermeneutical skills; (d) knowledge and understanding of the recipient culture; and (e) applying the message of Christian love through interpersonal relations, peace making, consensus, patience allowing for growth, and an emphasis on the truth as it is in Jesus.

The Bible As Standard in Bridging Cultural Gaps

In translating the Bible to the receivers, *universal concepts and practices* are most useful. When a gap occurs between the biblical concept and the recipient concept, it is particularly important to use the *Bible as a standard* to safeguard biblical truth.

Primacy of Actions and Attitudes In Communication

Actions and attitudes are useful to communicators and may achieve what words and teaching cannot achieve. There is particular importance in (a) speaking upon points on which you can agree; (b) making interpersonal relations a key; (c) allowing for time to pass and growth to take place; (d) focusing in action and dialogue on the truth as it is in Jesus; and (e) making the work of soul winning primarily a work of Christian love.

Variations in Local Church Life

A contextualized local Seventh-day Adventist Church could use *local expressions* of art, music, architecture, and worship forms in *church life*, if the

clear teaching of the Bible does not forbid it, if it has a clear purpose to foster genuine Seventh-day Adventist and biblical faith, and if it is acceptable to the local church (congregation and mission/union conference).

Identity and Baptism

Baptism and Spiritual Growth

If a model of contextualized ministry needs to reckon with a long period of spiritual growth after belief has been confessed in Jesus as personal savior, *baptism could take place at an early stage* if the baptized member is involved in a functional program of spiritual nurture with the goal of leading to a fuller understanding of the Bible. The aim of safeguarding the Seventh-day Adventist identity is vital.

Levels of Membership

In some cases, it could be a possibility to introduce *levels or degrees of membership* to provide for the need of fellowship and a sense of belonging as people continue to grow.

The Bible in Contextualization

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs applying to using the Bible as a standard for contextualization would be: (a) our view of the Bible as summarized in the Adventist statement of Fundamental Beliefs; (b) finding support by the Bible as a whole; (c) Christ as the center of the Bible would be the core belief serving as an interpretive model for understanding the Bible as a unity; (d) let text explain text after careful interpretation from the individual book as a whole; (e) openness for situations in which the knowledge necessary for baptism is expressed in the acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Savior, while the wider knowledge of the Bible must be given over a longer period of time.

Fundamental Beliefs of the Adventist Church

The *biblical core beliefs that constitute Adventism* and provide the unifying factors within our diversity would be the Fundamental Beliefs, or, in some cases, the Baptismal Vow. By translating the English text of the Fundamental Beliefs into another language, an acceptable degree of contextualization takes

place. In addition to that, ways may be found by which the beliefs are taught in the codes of foreign cultures, so that, over time, truth surfaces.

Core Beliefs and the Church As a Hermeneutical Community

There is *flexibility in how we may word the core truths of the Bible*. An absolute boundary in this connection, at least for employees of the church, is that adaptations of our faith and message should not be made individually in the process of contextualization, but dialogue with the church as a hermeneutical community is necessary. Individual decisions are seldom good ones and the Bible encourages us to seek counsel from each other. The church is a body and we can gain divine wisdom from each other's experiences.

Use of Holy Writings From Other Faiths

Holy writings from other religions, for example the Qur'an, can be used in a contextualized ministry. Our usage must, however, be selective, measured by the Bible, since there must be no confusion over the unique inspiration and authority of the Bible.

Biblically Shaped Worldview a Goal

Contextualization in mission must not give up the *goal of transforming the worldview* of the receivers into a biblically shaped worldview. That does not happen by simply changing bits and pieces; the biblical story as a whole is necessary to provide the truth.

Primacy of the Biblical Text Itself

As a rule, biblical theology from the *source of the text itself* must generally be favored over against any secondary systematization of the biblical message.

Safeguards Against Syncretism

Maintain Close Connection With the Scriptures

To safeguard against syncretism we must take the Bible as a whole, and use proper hermeneutical keys and models.

Pray for and Trust in God's Leading

Contextualizers must rely on the Holy Spirit who has promised to guide into all truth.

Check Motives and Attitudes

Are we truly trying to give the gospel as clearly as possible, or are we just making excuses for laxity? Do we have the mind of a servant, or are we just pushing our own agenda and culture? Are we prejudiced?

Dialogue with the Church As a Hermeneutical Community

The Adventist Church should set up proper forums for regularly handling issues dealing with contextualization in mission.

Realize That Over Time Truth Surfaces

Haste sometimes produces wrong decisions. Allow God to work and prove to us what his will is.

Maintain Concern for the Weak

Paul says in 1 Cor 9 that he became all things to the weak. The weak in this context refers to those who are bothered by changes taking place in the church. Committed contextualisers always consider the feelings of their brothers and sisters and try to relate to them while also relating to those who need to hear the gospel. Never forget that we are a world church that both needs to advance the gospel to all peoples while at the same time maintaining unity. If your approach to contextualization offends, which good contextualization tends to do, ensure that it is for the right reasons, not the wrong ones.¹⁵

Miscellaneous

Need for Evaluation

For some projects, it will be necessary to exercise a *periodic re-evaluation with proper church bodies needing to care for these reviews*. Perhaps executive committees should function more like mission boards that regularly follow-up on the challenge of contextualization.

Process

Recognize that contextualization is an ongoing process and that *guidelines must be flexible*. As our understanding of biblical truth grows, so too will our understanding of the world with which we are to share it.¹⁶

Notes

¹See for example (Dybdahl 1992:14-17), (Staples 1992:10-13), (Viera 1995:25-27), (Dabrowski 1995:10, 11), (Zachary 1997:8-12), and (Bruinsma 1997:14-16).

²Besides the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, our church now has an impressive *Working Policy*, a *Church Manual*, *Minister's Manual*, *Elder's Handbook*, and an expanding compilation of *Statements, Guidelines & Other Documents*; the Fundamental Beliefs have been explained in the publication of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988.

³Cf. Note Froom's opening statement: "In every religious movement there comes a time when the call of God to advance is sounded—a summons to quicken the pace, to take higher ground, to break with the *status quo*, to enter into a new relationship and experience with him. Especially is this true in the new Space Age into which we have now entered, with its stupendous achievements" (Froom 1971:23).

⁴For a practical orientation, see, for example, (Hiebert and Hiebert 1987) and (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:212-257).

⁵Note the concerns of General Conference President, Robert S. Folkenberg, (1995:6-8).

⁶While contextualization is the most common general term used by missiologists for cross-cultural adaptation or incarnational ministry, a number of meanings, methods, and models have been attached to it (see Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989). This is partly unavoidable, since, in its general sense, contextualization may refer to any activity by which the Christian message is communicated in an efficient and relevant way to the peoples of the world.

⁷As noted already by the translator of the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus; see the prologue to the book.

⁸See the first of the 27 Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs.

⁹See (Wiklander 1996:5-7).

¹⁰For further explanation see (Wiklander 1994:7-27).

¹¹See (White 1923b:128ff) where she states that "truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless . . . can be experienced, but never explained. Its height and breadth and depth surpass our knowledge."

¹²For an attempt to do this on Isa 2-4, see (Wiklander 1984).

¹³See (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:215), and note the further elaboration of this theme on pp. 212-221 with relevant case studies linked to Hans Rudi Weber's demonstration of how the Bible can be taught in a way that provides non-Western believers with a Christian worldview.

¹⁴Cf. (Hiebert 1987:110) and (Bruinsma 1997:16).

¹⁵See (Whiteman 1997:3).

¹⁶Cf. (Knight 1993:10-15).

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Chapter 6

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1998 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor's Note: At the conclusion of each year's Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 1998 three recommendations were prepared dealing with the use of sacred writings from other world religions, transitional organizational structures, and contextualization.

Statement on the Use of the Bible in Mission, Vis-à-vis "Sacred Writings" of Other World Religions

Recommended 14 January 1998

In "being all things to all men" the Global Mission Study Center directors are understanding and using scriptures highly valued by the people we are reaching out to as an instrument by which we can draw closer to our audience. We are being heard, we "step into their back yard," we are not humiliating or discrediting them. It is not necessary to take any position regarding the inspiration or holiness of the writings we use, which are known to them, and valued in determining right or wrong in their lives. In our communication with them we use these writings as a very deliberate introduction to the biblical writings, leading to an ultimate transfer of allegiance to the Bible. Not doing so would be

a failure and a discredit to the church. Therefore, the following guidelines are provided for use in the development of models.

1. Use of writings from other religions may have value as points of initial contact to show understanding for and sensitivity to other traditions and cultures, to lead a person initially along paths which are not totally unfamiliar, and to show that pointers which are found also in other world religions/traditions find their richest meaning in the life of faith as presented in the Bible.

2. The process of leading a person to Christ and to a life of faith in a society where Christianity is not established and where another world religion is dominant, shall be done essentially by the use of the Bible as the teaching instrument and source of authority.

3. The nurture and spiritual growth of believers (i.e., after baptism) in such an environment shall be accomplished by the use of the Bible as the sole authority.

Use of the Bible in Mission Vis-à-vis "Sacred Writings"

*Statement As Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Administrative Committee and As Edited by the Biblical Research Institute
June and July, 2003*

In building bridges with non-Christians, the use of their "sacred writings" could be very useful in the initial contact in order to show sensitivity and to lead persons along paths which are somewhat familiar. They may contain elements of truth that find their fullest and richest significance in the way of life found in the Bible. These writings should be used in a deliberate attempt to introduce people to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and to help them transfer their allegiance to the biblical writings as their source of faith and practice. However, certain risks are involved in the use of these writings. The following guidelines will help to avoid those risks.

- a. The Bible should be recognized as the teaching instrument and source of authority to be used in leading a person to Christ and to a life of faith in a society where another religion is dominant.

- b. The Church should not use language that may give the impression that it recognizes or accepts the nature and authority assigned to the "sacred writings" by the followers of specific non-Christian religions.

c. Those using “sacred writings” as outlined above should develop or create a plan indicating how the transfer of allegiance to the Bible will take place.

d. The nurture and spiritual growth of new believers in non-Christian societies shall be accomplished on the basis of the Bible and its exclusive authority.

Transitional Organizational Structures

Recommended 14 January 1998

The Christian mission of making disciples of all peoples has two related purposes, based on the wording of the Great Commission in Matt 28:18-20: One is to lead people to Christ by the experience of conversion and baptism; the other is to lead them into a functional church structure, where they are further taught to keep all things Christ has commanded, and in which they may grow in their faith and discipleship, serving as part of the world fellowship of believers. The Seventh-day Adventist mission of proclaiming the Three Angels’ Messages to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people includes incorporating believers in that message into the world fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been organized to accomplish this dual task of mission and nurture.

With their focus on mission and nurture, Seventh-day Adventists should work within the current church structure, but where this is not possible and transitional variations are being suggested, approval from the appropriate church body should come after seeking advice from church administrators as to whether the situation meets certain criteria, such as:

1. At times experimental organizational structures can be approved for testing, especially as a part of new initiatives in the mission of reaching resistant or previously unreached peoples.

2. Where regular church work and organization is not permitted by circumstances, transitional church organization can be fostered and supported.

3. In circumstances where no church organization of any kind is possible, the church can still foster and support mission.

In certain parts of the world, transitional church organization may sometimes be required for the church’s mission to be effective. However, we must work toward bringing all new believers in such circumstances to an awareness of and a participation in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Transitional Organizational Structures

*Statement As Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Administrative Committee and As Edited by the Biblical Research Institute
June and July, 2003*

According to Matt 28:18-20, the mission of the Church has three major inseparable components: 1) the mission should lead people to Jesus as their Saviour and Lord through conversion and baptism; 2) the mission is to incorporate a community of believers, the church, into an environment where they can grow in faith, knowledge, and the enjoyment of a universal fellowship of believers; and 3) the mission is to nurture and train members as active disciples who recognize and utilize their spiritual gifts to assist in sharing the gospel. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been founded and organized by the Lord to fulfill that gospel commission. The universal nature of the Church requires the existence of a basic and common organizational structure throughout the world that will facilitate the fulfillment of its mission.

Political and religious conditions in some countries could make it difficult or even impossible for the Church to function within its traditional organizational structure. A transitional organizational structure may be needed. In such cases the following guidelines should be employed to deal with the situation:

a. The transitional organizational structure would be justifiable under one of the following conditions:

1. When new initiatives need to be tested in the mission of reaching resistant or previously unreached peoples;

2. When regular church work and organization is not permitted due to local religious or political circumstances.

b. Church leaders at the division/union/local field where the transitional organizational structures are being set up should determine the nature of the transitional organization and whether it is appropriate to choose local leadership. They should also define the management of tithe and offerings within the transitional organization.

c. Workers who are providing leadership in the transitional organization should be personally committed to the doctrinal unity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to its worldwide ecclesiastical organization.

d. New converts should, as soon as possible, be made aware of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-

day Adventist Church—and that it has a particular message and mission to the world.

e. As soon as it is feasible, the transitional organizational structure should be replaced by the regular church organizational system.

Contextualization As a Part of the Mission Of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Recommended 14 January 1998

Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by compassion, under the authority of the Scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit. It aims to communicate biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way that is both faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged and/or affirmed by the gospel.

Contextualization of the way we express our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it, the church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, these adaptations have been taking place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the Three Angels' Messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. They should continue.

Contextualization recognizes that people will be the most loving and productive Christians when they can practice their faith, sing their songs, pray, nurture, and reach out within their own heart language and biblically affirmed customs.

There are eternal truths that all cultures deserve to know, which can be expressed and experienced in different ways. Contextualization aims to uphold the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, and to make them truly understood in their fullness. Local expressions of worship, art, prayer, evangelization methods, and Bible study are encouraged as they contribute to the spread of truth.

In the search for the best way to do contextualization, certain guidelines must be followed. The Bible must always be the final standard, the church community must work together on the best way to contextualize; it must be accompanied by earnest prayer, pure motives, and concern for those who have differing views. In the end, all true contextualization must be subject to Bible truth and bear results for God's kingdom.

Because uncritical contextualization is as dangerous as non-contextualization, it is not to be done at a distance, but in situ. It involves the local people, missionaries, new Christians, and appropriate levels of church leadership in a careful process of (1) an examination of the specific issue in the light of all cultures concerned, (2) an examination of all that Scripture may say about the issue, (3) the application of the Scripture to the issue, and (4) the careful practice of the mutually determined result.

The unity of the global church requires regular exposure to each other, each other's cultures, and each other's insights that "together with all the saints we may grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love" (Eph 3:18).

Contextualization and Syncretism

*Statement As Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Administrative Committee and As Edited by the Biblical Research Institute
June and July, 2003*

Contextualization is defined in this document as the intentional and discriminating attempt to communicate the gospel message in a culturally meaningful way. Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by the serious responsibility of fulfilling the gospel commission in a very diverse world. It is based on the authority of the Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit and aims at communicating biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way. In that task contextualization must be faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged by the gospel.

Intentional contextualization of the way we communicate our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it the Church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, adaptation has taken place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the Three Angels' Messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. This will continue to happen.

As the Church enters more non-Christian areas, the question of syncretism—the blending of religious truth and error—is a constant challenge and threat. It affects all parts of the world and must be taken seriously as we explore the practice of contextualization. This topic is highlighted by the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy between good and evil which explains Satan's mode of operation—distorting and compromising

truth, not by denying it, but by mixing truth and error, thus robbing the gospel of its true impact and power. In this context of danger and potential distortion, critical contextualization is indispensable.

Since the effects of sin and the need for salvation are common to all humanity, there are eternal truths that all cultures need to know, which in some cases can be communicated and experienced in different and yet equivalent ways. Contextualization aims to uphold all of the Fundamental Beliefs and to make them truly understood in their fullness.

In the search for the best way to contextualize, while at the same time rejecting syncretism, certain guidelines must be followed.

a. Because uncritical contextualization is as dangerous as non-contextualization, it is not to be done at a distance, but within the specific cultural situation.

b. Contextualization is a process that should involve world Church leaders, theologians, missiologists, local people, and ministers. These individuals should have a clear understanding of the core elements of the biblical worldview in order to be able to distinguish between truth and error.

c. The examination of the specific cultural element would necessitate an especially careful analysis by cultural insiders of the significance of the particular cultural element in question.

d. The examination of all the Scripture says about the issue or related issues is indispensable. The implications of scriptural teachings and principles should be carefully thought through and factored into proposed strategies.

e. In the context of reflection and prayer, scriptural insights are normative and must be applied to the specific cultural element in question. The analysis could lead to one of the following results:

1) The particular cultural element is *accepted*, because it is compatible with scriptural principles;

2) The particular cultural element is *modified* to make it compatible with Christian principles;

3) The particular cultural element is *rejected*, because it contradicts the principles of Scripture.

f. The particular cultural element that was accepted or modified is carefully implemented.

g. After a period of trial it may be necessary to evaluate the decision made and determine whether it should be discontinued, modified, or retained.

In the end, all true contextualization must be subject to biblical truth and bear results for God's kingdom. The unity of the global Church requires regular exposure to each other, each other's culture, and each other's insights that "together with all the saints we may grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love" (Eph 3:18).

Chapter 7

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BRIDGES NOT WALLS

BERTIL WIKLANDER

January 13-14, 1999

It goes without saying that Adventist traditional methods of evangelism are inadequate for reaching Muslims effectively. The Adventist Church is still groping for an effective method. The Lord has not opened the way yet. Hence, the quest for guidance from him continues. Meanwhile, I believe that in some places a traditional method like the Revelation Seminars can have some impact on Muslims or other non-Christian communities. Perhaps what we need to do is to revise the entire Revelation Seminar, especially lesson twenty-three.

Several years ago a Seventh-day Adventist pastor used the Revelation Seminar lessons in a Muslim country with some impressive initial success. But when he distributed Lesson 23, the hitherto highly interested prospects demanded the lecturer's head. It may not be necessary to give up entirely on the traditional methods, for with a little adaptation some of them may still yield desired dividends.

We should also work seriously on what to do when Muslims convert to Christianity. Conversion becomes one of the most traumatic experiences for Muslims, for they are almost always forced to leave their loved ones, relatives, and, indeed, their community due to threats to their own lives.

Christ's Method

There is an urgent need to develop evangelists skilled in witnessing among Muslims. This is a special weakness in the Adventist Church that needs concerted attention. I have expressed my sorrow over and over on the lack of courses in the Adventist centers of learning to meet this urgent need. Over the years, Adventists have perfected methods of reaching other non-Adventist Christians with the Advent Message, but little effort has been made to develop methods of reaching non-Christian peoples. I do hope some day my cry, and that of other concerned ministers, will be heeded.

Of course, we cannot come up with a method better than Christ's method. We can only adapt it as his apostles did. Call it the "incarnational methods" if you like. It is clear in the Bible that Christ's incarnational ministry caused him to condescend, to take our flesh, our experience, and our life of struggle with sin and its effects, including death itself, in order to raise us to his life of glory and immortality. In the same way Christ's witnesses should be ready to live among Muslims, eat their food, wear their clothes, and both sympathize and empathize with them in order to show them greater light. The witness should remain Christian, serving only as a catalyst within the Muslim community.

Neither do Muslims need to change their names. Interestingly, in the Bible, it was Jewish converts who had their names changed, e.g., Joses changed to Barnabas and Saul became Paul. But Gentile converts like Cornelius and Lydia retained their pre-Christian names. Why then should we even suggest to Muslims that they change their names if they do not take the initiative? Similarly, we need not insist that they change their way of life that is not objectionable to the gospel. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29) did not insist on that for Gentile converts.

In the presentation of the gospel, Christ's method is again the most effective model. His encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:1-42) summarizes this method: present the truth from the known to the unknown, from the common to the uncommon. However, Jesus never left his prospect, in this case, the Samaritan woman, where he met her. At the appropriate time, he clearly pointed out to her that salvation was "from the Jews" (John 4:22 NRSV). Likewise, no matter how cautiously we relate to Muslims we must reach a point where we do not leave them in any doubt concerning the fact that there is "no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved"

(Acts 4:12, NRSV). Jesus is the way of salvation, and this point must eventually be mentioned, but always in love.

Time for Caution

In our bid to develop methods of reaching non-Christians, especially Muslims, special care should be taken to avoid two undesirable developments: (a) syncretism, and (b) two parallel churches.

Syncretism

The Bible (Rom 4:16) and the Qur'an (al-Hajj 22:78) suggest that both Christians and Muslims derive their faith from Abraham. However, al-Baqarah 2:130-135 and al-Imran 3:52 add that Abraham and all the prophets after him, including Christ's disciples, were "Muslims." I agree that I am a "Muslim" in the general sense of one who surrenders to God, but I would hesitate to introduce myself as a Muslim, for fear of being misunderstood. Those who are known as "Muslims" today are those who became Muslims after declaring the *Shahada*: *la ilaha il-Allah, wa Muhammadar Rasul-Allah* (There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is Allah's Messenger). I am not a Muslim in this sense because the *Shahada* presents Muhammad as the sole messenger of God, and that seriously contradicts the fourth pillar of the Islamic faith which clearly states belief in all of God's messengers: "We make no distinction between any of the messengers" (al-Baqarah 2:285) is the comment that follows the fourth pillar of Islam.

Let me remind us of our Christian uniqueness. The Christian Church has a unique gospel of salvation through a crucified but risen Saviour (1 Cor 15:1-4) but which the Qur'an specifically denies (al-Nisa'i 4:157, 158). Christians have a specific Gospel Commission which enjoins believers to go out and "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). The Church also has unique doctrines, the violation of which amounts to crucifying Christ afresh (Heb 1:1-6). Then 1 Cor 11:2 and 2 Thess 3:6, 7 show that we have our unique traditions and our way of life. Indeed, at the very beginning of Christian experience, baptism symbolizes death to the old life and resurrection into a new life in Christ (Rom 6:4). Thus Rom 12:1 asserts that anyone who accepts Christ no longer "conforms" to this world, but rather is "transformed" by the renewal of one's mind in order "to prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (NKJV).

Among the apostles, Paul was foremost in developing an incarnational ministry. Paul succinctly said that he intended to win the people he was working

for “by all means” (1 Cor 9:22). Yet there was a limit as to how far Paul would go. Some Jews insisted that converts be circumcised as a condition for salvation (Acts 15:1), but the Jerusalem Council rejected circumcision as necessary for Gentile believers (Acts 15:29). But the Judaizers continued to make a lot of fuss about circumcision and other divisive rituals with the result that even some of the apostles (Peter and Barnabas) succumbed to the pressure. Paul remained firm, emphasizing (Col 2:11-13) that baptism replaced the important spiritual symbolism of circumcision. But Paul re-baptized some Christians who had experienced only the baptism of John (Acts 19:1-5). So with the apostles, and especially with Paul, there was no room for compromise and or syncretism.

Parallel Churches

The existence of two parallel churches is not a new problem. In Gal 2:7-12 we read that, what began as an evangelistic strategy in the Apostolic Church, eventually divided the church into two groups: one church for the circumcised and another church for the uncircumcised. The first church to go out of existence was, of course, the church of the circumcised. Its doom may be traced to its initial preaching of “another Jesus . . . or a different gospel” (2 Cor 11:4). The church of the uncircumcised survived, but eventually in apostasy, according to Dan 7:25 (see also 2 Thess 2:7-12).

I hope that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in its bid to develop a strategy to win Muslims, will not end up developing two parallel Adventist churches with perhaps two different names, one with a traditional Adventist lifestyle and the other with a kind of *hanif* lifestyle. In the same way that the word *Muslim* can have different shades of meaning, the Qur'an uses the word *hanif* with both general and specific meanings. *Hanifism* can be traced back to Abraham (al-An'am 6:161, al-Nahl 16:123). Generally, the word *hanif* means one who is “upright” or “righteous.” Of course, it is my earnest desire to be a *hanif* in this general sense of being upright.

However, originally *hanif* meant one who turned away from the existing idol worship to the worship of the one true God. Thus the *hanif* were specifically the monotheistic Arabs of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era. Before Muhammad, *hanif* believers had no organized community and no well-defined set of beliefs. They believed in the unity of God as the only Creator, had a concept of the resurrection, and engaged in yearly meditation in caves during the month of Ramadan (Sell 1913:1, 2). Waraqah, Muhammad's brother-in-law,

was a *hanif* who became a Christian; Ubaydallah B. Jahsh, the son of one of Muhammad's aunts was a *hanif* who became a Muslim but turned Christian while in exile with the rest of the Muslims in Abbysinia (Ethiopia), and Zayd B. Amr, one of Muhammad's uncles, who converted Muhammad to *hanifism* remained a *hanif* till his death (Sell 1913:25). Caution is needed lest we create a fellowship that may not stand the test of time.

I understand that *hanifism* is now being replaced by "Faith Development in Context" [FDIC]. The term *hanif* is now being reserved, as it were, for those people who feel that they have become better Muslims after accepting and practicing some key Bible teachings. I am glad that reason has finally prevailed in restricting the use of this term. This has partly addressed the concerns I have raised concerning the promotion of an Adventist *hanifism*. However, I shall wait to see how this new approach develops, since I still do not really know the difference between *hanifism* and FDIC. I notice that FDIC is advocating, among other things, the development of "parallel structures" by the denomination, where the regular Church could exist along with a parallel church for Muslim believers.

The Task Before Us

We must develop an incarnational ministry that will adequately reach Muslims with the everlasting gospel using Christ's method in a way that will allow Muslims to replace some of their beliefs and practices with better Christian beliefs and practices. Eventually, Muslims must understand that the Sabbath day is the day of worship; that even the Qur'an (al-Nisa'i 4:154) states that God gave Israel a definite command on Sabbath observance; and that (al-Baqarah 2:65, 66) it is a violation of that command that brought punishment which served as "an example to their own and to the succeeding generations and an admonition to the God-fearing" (al-Muttaqeen). Thus, since God did not give such an injunction for the observance of any other day, Muslims do not need to go to mosques on Friday for public prayer anymore.

Similarly, Muslims need to come to the point where they are convinced that it is better to fast when the need arises (Matt 9:14, 15) than to engage in the ritual annual Ramadan fast. It is also important to point out to them that Christ ruled out any need for the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to any spot on this earth, because it is now the time for all to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:21, 23). Muslims also should be taught that the *id-ui-adha* (festival of sacrifices at the

end of the pilgrimage, *al-Hajj* 22:27, 28) has no spiritual importance anymore for the sacrifice of Christ, which was done “once for all” (Heb 10:10), is now appropriately and adequately symbolized by the celebration of holy communion (John 13:1-10). These and other distinctive Christian beliefs and duties constitute the task of the Christian witness to explain to all prospective Muslim converts for their consideration and acceptance before baptism and integration into the Adventist Church.

Christ’s Goal

I began this paper with Christ’s method and I would like to close with Christ’s goal. Christ’s primary goal was accomplished because he broke down “the dividing wall” (Eph 2:14) that existed at his first coming through his effective method as explained above. My concern is that we would not do anything to rebuild it or erect another wall. Rather, let us use his bridging method to accomplish his ultimate goal: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, One Shepherd” (John 10:16, NRSV).

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Chapter 8

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CONTEXTUALIZATION, CHURCH, AND CONFESSION

RUSSEL L. STAPLES

January 13-14, 1998

Introduction—The Issues

In a memorable phrase that stands out like a beacon in the history of the Christian church, William Temple, at his enthronement as archbishop of Canterbury in 1942, referred to the existence of worldwide Christendom as “the great new fact of our time.” For the first time in human history, Christianity had spread around the globe and become the largest and most widely followed religion. It had gained members from all the religions of humankind, and wherever it entered it wrought change in every dimension of human existence. During the dark days of World War II and faced with an uncertain future, William Temple derived courage from looking outwards at the work of God among the nations. At the time world population was 2.4 billion people with approximately 800 million, or one person in three a Christian. At that same time there were almost 600,000 Adventists.

What no one could then know, or even dare to dream was that the numerical growth of the Adventist Church during the next sixty years would exceed anything that had previously taken place. Growth has been especially rapid in

Africa and in other primal societies where the movement into Christianity is without precedent in Christian history. The number of Christians in Africa has grown from about 30 million in 1946 to 350 million today—and it is expected that there will be more Christians in Africa within a few years than on any other continent.

During this period the number of Christians has grown to almost 2 billion, but still remains a steady 33 percent of world population. The Adventist Church has grown with even greater rapidity to about 10 million and the demographic shift from the Western or developed nations to the two-thirds world has been even more dramatic in the Adventist Church than in Christianity as a whole.

The above configuration of growth in primal societies serves to dramatize the comparatively slow progress in reaching the populations of the great world religions, especially those of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The missionary challenge and status of the church varies widely from place to place within these religious populations, and in many places substantial gains have been made, but generally the difficulties are great and progress has been slow. Recently, Ralph Winter wrote, “The world Christian movement has largely stalled in relation to the Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist blocks of unreached peoples” (1998:218).

Missionary societies in general, particularly those within the evangelical umbrella, are much concerned about this challenge and are engaged in serious study and prayer in search for avenues of entry. This is encouraging. Earlier there seemed to be a general mind-set regarding the worst case scenarios of these religions; that not much could be done, that the difficulties were too great, and positive response too little to warrant major investment. Little was done to inspire prospective missionaries to take up the challenge. After all, the reasoning was that there is still much to be done in responsive unreached fields.

I rejoice that much more serious efforts are now being made to find ways of attracting adherents of the great world religions to Christ and of fostering communities of believers. The task is exceedingly complex and differs from religion to religion and even among adherents of the same religion. For instance, it is difficult to conceive of more widely contrasting worldviews than those of Muslims and Hindus, but at a practical level there is a certain kind of parallelism in attitudes and approaches to them. The task we face is not merely that of effectively engaging and appealing to adherents of these religions, an even greater challenge among some, is that of providing satisfying communal and spiritual support. There are no simple answers to the major challenges faced.

The concerns addressed in this paper relate to the following three issues. First, what kinds of missionary approach will best engage and lead to conversion? There is the necessity of contextualization and the attendant danger of syncretism. Second, what kind of Christian community best serves the needs of converts: Messianic communities, new communities of faith, or incorporation into established Christian communities (extraction evangelism)? Third, what is the missional function of confessional statements and catechisms? What is the function of a common confession of faith in promoting worldwide unity and an Adventist sense of identity? What is the purpose and function of local confessions?

Contemplation of such issues in the light of the vast challenge of the unfinished task serves to indicate both the gravity and complexity of the task and the need for divine guidance and willingness to be led along unfamiliar paths. We are reminded that God himself is the Lord of mission and that we are dependent upon him to open the gateways to the nations. Our task is to submit to his ways in obedient discipleship.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate possible avenues of approach to the above issues. In order to provide some basis for this discussion, I turn in the first instance to the example of the revelation of the purpose of God for all mankind in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This is followed by a description of the experience of the Jewish Christian Church and of the founding and development of thought in the Gentile Church. Concepts gathered from these examples will be applied to the contemporary challenges outlined above.

God's Purpose for Humanity Revealed in Jesus Christ

The ever-present task of mission is the translation of the meaning of Christ, for it is in the incarnation that the purpose of God for humankind is revealed. As the apostle Paul wrote, "He has made known to us His hidden purpose . . . that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ" (Eph 1:9). Christ belongs to the totality of humankind, and the challenge to every generation of Christians is to make the meaning of the incarnation and of the life, death, and resurrection of the God/man known to every human being. We are called to do so in a way that leads to acceptance and a spiritual relationship with Christ.

It is for this reason that mission is called the mother of theology. It is in the missionary situation that decisions must be made regarding the essentials of

the gospel, and how these can be best communicated. It is subsequently necessary to analyze what has been heard, what the converts have done with the message, and provide correctives if needed. The theological task is never completed. New situations require new ways of interpreting and communicating the eternal significance of the one who took our human form in order that “we might become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

A Double Paradox

There is a double paradox at the heart of Christianity.¹ The first is the relation of the human and the divine in the person of Jesus Christ. “The word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This is a mystery of vast significance. We recite the creed as if we understand it:

He is of the same reality as God (*homoousion tō patri*) as far as his deity is concerned: and of the same reality as we are ourselves (*homoousion hēmin*) as far as his humanness is concerned. . . . This one and only Christ . . . in two natures, without confusing the two natures, . . . the distinctiveness of each is not nullified by union (*The Definition of Chalcedon 451 A.D.*).

The more we contemplate the meaning of the incarnation, the greater the mystery and the greater our wonder at this divine act of translation. It should not surprise us, given the depth of the meaning of the incarnation, that different interpretations, each accenting different dimensions of this mystery, have arisen over the years.

The Eastern Church emphasizes the light the incarnation throws upon our understanding of human nature. In Christ it is seen that the human has a capacity for the divine (co-inherence).

The distinctness of the two natures has been stressed with some laying emphasis upon the human, others the divine nature.

Others have laid emphasis upon the unity of the person of Christ and on the significance of his bearing human nature to the throne of heaven (1 Tim 2:4) as a demonstration of the ultimate destiny of those who follow him.

In Western Christianity there has been a tendency to stress the “work” of the divine Christ—i.e., his vicarious atonement on the cross as the basis of forgiveness and salvation.

The Eastern Church conceives of salvation in more ontological terms. Salvation is thought of as the obverse of the incarnation—Christ became human

in order that humans might be lifted up and become partakers of the divine nature.

Others, particularly in American evangelicalism, have emphasized the example of the human Christ—the “In His Steps” theme.

The purpose in listing these aspects of the divine/human mystery (paradox) is to show the depth of meaning in the divine act of translation which lies at the heart of the gospel and not to attempt a theological evaluation of the positions emphasized. There is theological/salvific value in all of the above positions. Theological deviation, as it has been defined by the church, has generally arisen from a tendency to elevate one aspect of the divine/human mystery out of proportion to the whole. There has been a general tendency in the history of Christianity to fragment the gospel, i.e., to emphasize one aspect—i.e., forgiveness (justification by faith) or the opposite extreme, the beautiful example of the human Christ—out of proportion to the totality of the glory of the mystery of Christ. The history of the interpretation of the nature and work of Christ and of what constitutes the gospel of salvation is an illustration of the immense richness of the divine/human mystery. It is also an indication of the complexity of the missionary task of translating the gospel in categories of human thought.

All of this serves as both encouragement and warning regarding the concerns that occasion this conference. If, like Paul, we ask, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (1 Cor 2:16), we can also take courage as we consider the depth and breadth of the divine/human mystery. There is an unfathomable resource upon which to draw as we seek to translate the meaning of Christ to the Hindu or Muslim mind or retranslate it to the secular West.

The second paradox is that of the Jewish particularity of Jesus and the universalism of the Son of the Divine. Jesus took up his earthly pilgrimage as a member of a particular human race and culture. He directed his life in harmony with the Torah and restricted his ministry to the children of Israel (a point not missed by zealous Muslims). One reading the synoptic gospels is impressed by the Jewishness of Jesus. At the same time, there are indications that as the divine Son of God he belonged to the totality of humanity. There is a tension between the principles of localization and universalization at the heart of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The same holds true in every missionary endeavor to translate the gospel.² On the one hand, the gospel must be localized as in the ministry of Christ. The significance of Christ can hardly be made too clear. There should be no failure to so translate/localize the message that it faithfully transmits the significance

of the incarnation, engages the recipients' worldview and changes patterns of thought and behavior. The gospel can hardly be made too applicable. As in the ministry of Jesus, it is the task of the faithful disciple to localize the gospel to a particular culture.

On the other hand, the gospel is a powerful universalizing force. Even as it is translated into local significance, the conviction that Christ, the divine Son of God, belongs to the totality of humanity brings with it a realization that the family of Christ is composed of people of every place and culture. The salvation offered by Christ points beyond present reality to the great gathering of peoples from every tribe and nation before the throne of God and generates the realization that "we have no abiding city here." The more clearly the gospel is particularized, so that the full significance of the person and work of Christ are understood and accepted as revealing the purposes of God for the entire human race, the more powerfully it universalizes.

Fidelity to the gospel leads to both localization and universalization. Thus we have, and accept, diversity within the church within an overriding sense of oneness—of belonging to the family of God. The gospel breaks down the walls of partition between peoples and societies and confers an identity which transcends, but does not displace, all local particularity. Plurality and diversity remain but are relativized by a powerful sense of oneness in Christ.

Principles of Translation and Pilgrimage

Consideration of the purpose of God, as it is revealed in the mystery of the incarnation, leads us to enunciate two fundamental missionary principles—those of translation/contextualization and pilgrimage.

The Principle of Translation/Contextualization

The first is that of translation. The incarnation, the divine revelation to human beings of the nature of God and of his purposes for them lies at the heart of Christianity. This is the supreme divine act of translation or self-revelation. God saw fit to reveal his purposes for humankind through an act of translation that brought the mysteries of God to the human level. "And we saw His glory, such glory as befits the Father only. The Father's only Son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Later, in answer to Philip, Jesus said, "How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). So also, the

primary task of the missionary disciple is that of translating the meaning and significance of the incarnation. The initial divine act of translation was the har-binger of repeated acts of translation and re-translation as the history of the Christian Church bears evidence. This is an ever present task, and one fraught with complexity and ambiguity—the latter because of the impossibility of conceptualizing the reality of God in human categories. This is an immense challenge to the church in every age and every society.

This process of translation has been given many names over the years—adaptation, accommodation, indigenization, inculturation, to make *einheimisch*, contextualization, and so on. The latter is the most widely accepted concept in current use. In general the concept is broad, encompassing intellectual explanation (truth encounter), forms of ritual and life style, and at times, also conflict with spiritual powers (power encounter.)

Translatibility lies at the heart of the Christian faith as is demonstrated in both the incarnation and the Scriptures. But with every translation there is the danger of mistranslation. The process is fraught with an inescapable tension of a different kind to that between the particularity and universality of Jesus Christ. Here the tension is between the concern to faithfully translate the message in ways that make it clear and compelling, and yet the possibility of misrepresentation leading to syncretism is ever present. This is a tension fraught with creative opportunities on the one hand (for instance, Don Richardson's *Redemptive Analogies* and the Darnell/Whitehouse use of the *Hanif* theme) and the danger of what is understood to be heretical on the other. There have been many crises in church history in this connection.

The Principle of Pilgrimage

The gospel, translated with fidelity into thought forms that can be comprehended (and the vehicles and categories of communication may be different from society to society), and applied by the power of the Holy Spirit leads to conversion and the transformation of lives and societies. It leads inevitably to a process of pilgrimage. The gospel meets people where they are, but it does not leave them there. It is the most powerful transformative force on earth. Ironically, social scientists tend to be more cognizant of this than many missionaries. The gospel comes to people as they are, but it leads them to higher levels of thought and life. As Christ begins to rule in the minds of his people, there arises a sense of tension between what they are and think and the way the gos-

pel reveals things should be. Very few if any persons have been able to accept the gospel without change, even change which may be difficult. As Jesus said, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt 10:34). Christianity becomes the determinative factor in their lives, a force that relativizes all human aims and constraints. The dominion of Christ is extended over earthly relationships, and Christians, in a sense, grow into a dual citizenship. They remain members of the society of their birth and daily lives, but even as they become members of that society which "has no abiding city here," they, in a sense, feel out of step with their former society. For the gospel judges its principles and values, and they begin to live by a higher mandate.

Before applying these principles to the present circumstances of our missionary task, it may be helpful to see how they functioned in the Jewish and Gentile churches of the New Testament.

History: The Jerusalem and Gentile Churches

The Jerusalem Church

The synoptic gospels are rooted in the soil of Palestine. Jesus taught about the kingdom of God, and his followers accepted him as the Messiah who was to restore Israel. They identified him as the "Son of Man," "the suffering servant," the "redeemer of Israel," spoken of by the prophets. On the Emmaus Road Cleopas said, "We had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). The disciples, as they gathered together before the ascension, asked, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6)? The miracle the Jews expected of Jesus was deliverance from the Romans and restoration of the kingdom of Israel (see also 1 Cor 1:22 where "Messiah" became the surname of Jesus).

For a brief period after Pentecost, Christianity was almost entirely Jewish. The believers formed a tightly-knit society with all things in common. They frequently met in the temple where only Jews could enter, they circumcised their male children, followed the Jewish ritual cycle, kept the law, and read the prophets. They appeared to be what we might call a denomination of Judaism. Some followers even restricted their message "to Jews only and no others" (Acts 11:19). They could hardly even conceive of God bestowing his full blessings upon Gentiles or of admitting them to full fellowship in Israel as the experience of Peter with Cornelius and subsequently with the elders at Jerusa-

lem showed. To become a Christian was to be inducted into Israel. Proselytes underwent circumcision which was the sign of the covenant with Israel, they were to learn and keep the Torah, which was the great gift of God to Israel, and in effect to leave their ethnicity and culture behind and become Jews. This is similar to what in contemporary mission practice is called "extraction evangelism." In the modern situation converts in effect abandon almost everything related to their previous society and their new community of faith becomes a surrogate community/family.

The dominant aspect of Jewish Christology was that they accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah who was to bring in the kingdom. This was a somewhat restricted view of the meaning of the incarnation. This became apparent a little later in church history, when Jewish Christians had extreme difficulty accepting the full divinity of Christ—a position called Ebionitism. Their radical monotheism and elevated concept of Yahweh militated against acceptance of the full meaning of the incarnation. The Messiah was to them more like a very great prophet, one akin to Moses, or a deified person rather than a member of the Godhead, preexistent, and eternal.

The Early Gentile Church

God apprehended Paul and gave him a vision of the missionary task. This was grounded in the conviction of the universality of Jesus Christ—that he had significance for the totality of humanity, that he was more than the Messiah who was to restore the kingdom to Israel. But given the difference between the Greek and Jewish mentality, how was the message of Christ to be construed? Hebrew thought was practical, related to the circumstances of life. It was on the basis of revelation that they believed that God had created the world. The enquiring Greek mind, on the other hand, asked the big questions about life and reality and developed answers that could be rationally substantiated in terms of a given philosophical pattern of thought. What would the term "Messiah" mean to them?

The initial breakthrough occurred at Antioch when Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene began to speak to "Gentiles as well, telling them the good news of the Lord (*kurios*) Jesus" (Acts 11:20). These disciples dropped the term Messiah which meant so much to them but which was liable to portray Jesus as a national savior. Instead they used the term *kurios*. This was a bold step, for *kurios* was the common title given to deities of the Greek pagan religions. But

they took the risk and filled the term with universal significance as they taught of the Christ who had come to save all people.

The apostle Paul used the term "Messiah" only in proving to the Hebrews that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 9:22). In speaking to the Gentiles he too used *kurios* in the universal sense. He also used other Greek words such as *logos* and *plēroma* which were filled with philosophical meanings that Paul could harness to explain who Jesus was and the significance of the incarnation. In so doing he invested the terms with new meanings. He taught that the purpose of God for the entire human race was revealed in Christ—and this was something the Greek philosophers had failed to find by their wisdom (1 Cor 1:21-24; 2:6-10; see also Eph 1:9, 10; Phil 2:5-11; and Col 1:13-20).

This translation of the message of Christ immensely broadened and deepened the theological understanding of the significance of Christ. In addition, it expanded understandings of who constituted the community of Christ. Paul taught that Christ had broken down the walls dividing Hebrews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22). Gentile believers were no longer "aliens, but fellow citizens, members of God's household." A corollary was that it was no longer necessary for converts to undergo the Jewish rites of induction or keep all of the rituals of Israel in order to join the new community of Christ.

The Council of Jerusalem at which these issues were discussed was a watershed in Christian history. There were those who were convinced that in order for the Gentiles to join Israel, it was necessary for them to enter the covenant of God with Israel by circumcision, and keep the details of the ceremonial law. After "much debate" (this is not difficult to imagine) the Council in effect decided (Acts 15:23-29) that these traditional rites were for Jewish Christians and not required of Gentiles.

One wonders whether the mother church of Christianity at Jerusalem fully understood the significance of what they had decided. Did they have any idea that the future of Christianity in a sense lay with these Gentile Christians whom they regarded as having an inadequate understanding of the prophets and of the law and its rituals? On the other hand, did they themselves adequately understand the intellectual breadth and depth of the Christological concerns with which these new, Greek Christians were beginning to wrestle?

The Christological issues the Greek Church faced were quite different from those with which the Jewish Christians wrestled. It was difficult for Greeks to accept the full implications of Christ's entry into human existence, in spite of the teaching of the apostle Paul. John writes of persons who were reluctant

to “confess that Christ had come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2). This, it is believed, stemmed from Greek dualism in which the realm of flesh was regarded as the sphere of corruption and unreality. If Christ came to deliver humans from the realm of flesh, it was argued, then his involvement in it could only have been apparent and not real. Such Christians were called Docetists from the Greek *dokein*, meaning to appear. They accepted the historical existence of Christ and thus reduced it to an appearance. This is almost precisely the opposite of Hebrew Ebionitism. Both views set up an antithesis between the Divine and earthly beings which virtually precluded the union of the divine and human natures of Christ. This was a tragic turn of thought because our Lord took human flesh and dwelt among us to show his closeness to us. Through Christ we have access, open and free, to the Father. Both views blocked the way to a recognition of the immense depth of meaning inherent in the incarnation. The early church wrestled with these and related issues and eventually adopted a creed affirming the double *homoousios* of our Lord and Savior—his full humanity and his full divinity—which had vast significance for the understanding of the nature and destiny of human beings.

The Gentile Church came to live by a double heritage. They adopted the heritage of the Hebrew Church, particularly that of its elevated concept of God the Creator and Sustainer of all that is, and the concept of a moral universe. But even as they lived by this heritage, their Greek intellectual heritage led them to explore the significance of the incarnation and in so doing they expanded the understanding of the meaning of the gospel for subsequent generations of Christians. The gospel was clarified and enriched during this process of translation.

I recount this history because there is much about the contemporary challenge of translating the gospel for the populations of the great Asian religions that is parallel to the process described above. In addition it illustrates both the necessity of, and dangers inherent in, the process of translation. The Gentile Church faced issues the Hebrews had never faced and could hardly be expected to understand. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit new ways of conceptualizing the mystery of Jesus Christ were found which have been helpful to this day.

This is probably the greatest example of its kind in the history of the church, but certainly not the only case of reinvestigation of the central meaning of the gospel with ensuing correction and enrichment. This is an ongoing process. I was frequently challenged to examine my own faith in the presence of primal

people. Much about the reverence and awe of God can be learned from Muslims. William Temple, who was much preoccupied with the gospel of John, is reputed to have said that we await a commentary, by a Christian who has come out of Hinduism, to open the full depth of this gospel to us.

Application to Contemporary Mission Praxis

The purpose of this brief survey of some facets of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and of the experience of the early Jewish Christian and Gentile Churches is to highlight principles intrinsic to the mission of the church.

Mission is God's mission, and the defining act in that mission is the incarnation. This central act of translation sets the stage for all subsequent attempts to translate the meaning of Jesus Christ for the peoples of earth. The immense breadth and depth of the incarnation provides vast resources upon which the disciple can draw in communicating the meaning of the gospel. The tension between the particularity or Jewishness of Jesus Christ and the universality of his status and purposes as the Son of God foreshadows, in a sense, both the particularity of a given community of faith and the universality of the church as the body of Christ. And we have taken note of the twin principles of translation/contextualization in the communication of the message, and of the transforming and universalizing power of the gospel which leads to pilgrimage.

We now seek to apply this pattern of thought to the three issues outlined above, which provide the occasion for this paper. Circumstances of mission and the religious orientation of host societies are diverse in the extreme. Different approaches may be needed, and each of the above topics is worthy of a book. The best that can be done here regarding the first two concerns is to describe cases and situations which facilitate the drawing of somewhat general conclusions. A slightly broader discussion of the use and functions of creeds/confessions follows later.

Conversion—Contextualization and Syncretism

The necessity of translation/contextualization is so obvious as not to require justification. Unless the message is communicated in terms that can be understood and which engage, there can hardly be an adequate response. The process of contextualization is extremely complex and requires skills of many kinds. But it is a joyful challenge that faces every serious disciple in one way or another, which we gladly accept. The task becomes ever more complex as

the cultural and religious distance between the disciple and the prospective convert widens.

It is not our purpose to explore the process of contextualization in detail here. There exists a large and readily available literature. The focus is rather upon the tension between contextualization that conveys the message with fidelity and that which goes too far in utilizing alien religious concepts and opens the way to syncretism. It is not a simple matter in the short haul to differentiate between the two. The focus here will be on a current debate among evangelicals regarding contextualization among Muslims—doubtless one of the greatest challenges the church faces.

Before doing so it seems helpful to point out that a failure to adequately contextualize is fully as fruitful of syncretism, and perhaps on a wider scale, than overzealous contextualization. This is not always recognized because it generally results in a fairly widely-distributed, low-grade form, as over against the more highly visible dramatic examples in the latter case.

For instance, I discovered that prayers were addressed to ancestors as avenues of access to God alongside of Jesus Christ in prayer meeting circles in several Protestant communities in Zimbabwe. I also discovered that several of the independent churches were more successful in combating this trend than were the major churches. On one occasion Bishop Mutendi, one of the noted Zionist leaders in Zimbabwe, explained to me, "We still dance and sing and preach and pray like Africans, but we take the ancestors out of their hearts. Our services are responsive to their needs, (i.e., we provide functional substitutes to traditional rituals for protection and blessing and healing) and give them much happiness. You missionaries change people on the outside but you don't know what is in their hearts and can't take the ancestors out." I knew this movement and this man well enough to know that there was much truth to what he said.

By and large, in many areas of Africa inadequate attention has been given to matters relating to traditional rituals of initiation, protection against sorcery and evil spirits, divination and healing, and above all to funerals and induction of the deceased into the other world at second funerary services. This has resulted in a sort of dual allegiance in which members appeal alternately to the great transcendent tradition of Christianity and the little African tradition according to need. At the same time, these people are vibrant Christians with a faith in the closeness of the divine that shames ours.

By and large, this is not yet syncretism as is the case when formal prayers are offered to ancestors, but tends to develop in that direction. Several anthro-

pologists, and one Roman Catholic theologian with whom I am acquainted, recognize a parallel in this to the Christianization of Europe in which ancestor-related beliefs were syncretized into the doctrine of holy souls in purgatory and saints in heaven. Of course, this was facilitated by a predisposing Greek dualism.

Objective analysis has led missiologists to the conclusion that this tendency in Africa and among other primal peoples is the result of inadequate contextualization. They suggest that the best solution to remedy the situation is for church leaders and responsible lay persons to engage in an exercise of critical contextualization in which traditional beliefs and rituals are carefully examined as to their compatibility with the gospel. This, in turn, can lead to decision making by the Christian community regarding appropriate theological instruction and forms and occasions of ritual and worship.

A Case in Muslim Evangelism

There is an ongoing debate among evangelicals regarding the extent to which the disciple identifies with and contextualizes the message to Muslims which provides a platform for useful discussion.³

The challenges in the communication of the gospel to Muslims are many and complex and vary from society to society. There has been a conviction that not nearly enough has been done and that much bolder forms of identification and contextualization are needed. Some have suggested that the disciple should declare himself or herself to be a Muslim and participate in prayers in the mosque. Such a person, it is said, becomes like a Muslim in order to win Muslims (1 Cor 9:19, 20). Or, to state the strategy another way, one has to begin within the Muslim mind and heart and identify with them in what they accept and value. There is general agreement that much more needs to be done. The problem is exactly what to do and how far to go.

The issues that stand out in such radical contextualization may be clustered together under several headings. There are, first of all, questions as to how far the disciple should go to win Muslims. Is it advisable to worship and participate in prayers at the mosque and keep the feast of Ramadan? Is it wise and advantageous to take a Muslim identity? Is there the danger that the disciple in going to these lengths sets a pattern that predisposes new converts in the direction of syncretism from which it is difficult to extricate them? Some evangelicals are prepared to make these bold advances. Others are considerably more cautious

and regard some such measures as dysfunctional. Experimentation is under-way, but it is too early to judge the results.

Without fairly radical contextualization and identification, the disciple fails to engage as has been the pattern in the past. On the other hand, the danger of betraying the Christian faith is real and the line between the two is thin. In addition, practical matters regarding human rights, the exercise of *Sharia* law, and the degree of social antagonism to conversion vary from society to society. What can be done in one place may not be possible in another.

Secondly, how far does the disciple go in using the Qur'an and Islamic religious terms for God, Jesus, salvation, etc.? Debates and differences of opinion in regards to this go back to early church history. The Tertullian statement, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" and Ricci and the famous "Rites Controversy" are cases in point. The general consensus in this connection appears to be favorable, but within limits. Throughout its history Christianity has often taken traditional terms and concepts and filled them with new meaning. Why not do so once again in mission to Muslims? The Qur'an has frequently been used as a bridge to convey elements of the Christian faith. Here again, unless care is taken, this may serve to affirm the authority of the Qur'an and impede the acceptance of the Scriptures as the final authority. The Global Mission Issues Statement on "Sacred Writings" is similar to the view of evangelical moderates. The second clause of this statement, however, may be a little more restrictive.

The third issue of what to do with new converts is discussed in the following section.

John Travis, (a pseudonym) has drawn up the following scale that compares and contrasts types of "Christ-centered communities" in Muslim societies. I include it here as a basis for discussion. "C" stands for Community. Travis introduces the typology with the following statement of purpose:

The spectrum attempts to address the enormous diversity which exists throughout the Muslim world in terms of ethnicity, history, traditions, language, culture, and, in some cases, theology.

The purpose of the spectrum is to assist church planters and Muslim background believers to ascertain which type of Christ-centered communities may draw the most people from the target group to Christ and best fit in a given context. All of these six types are presently found in some part of the Muslim world (Travis 1998:407-408).

C1 Traditional Church Using Outsider Language

May be Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant. Some predate Islam. Thousands of C1 churches are found in Muslim lands today. Many reflect Western culture. A huge cultural chasm often exists between the church and the surrounding Muslim community. Some Muslim background believers may be found in C1 churches. C1 believers call themselves "Christians."

C2 Traditional Church Using Insider Language

Essentially the same as C1 except for language. Though insider language is used, religious vocabulary is probably non-Islamic (distinctively "Christian"). The cultural gap between Muslims and C2 is still large. Often more Muslim background believers are found in C2 than C1. The majority of churches located in the Muslim world today are C1 or C2. C2 believers call themselves "Christians."

C3 Contextualized Christ-Centered Communities Using Insider Language and Religiously Neutral Insider Cultural Forms

Religiously neutral forms may include folk music, ethnic dress, artwork, etc. Islamic elements (where present) are "filtered out" so as to use purely "cultural" forms. The aim is to reduce foreignness of the gospel and the church by contextualizing to biblically permissible cultural forms. May meet in a church building or more religiously neutral location. C3 congregations are comprised of a majority of Muslim background believers. C3 believers call themselves "Christians."

C4 Contextualized Christ-Centered Communities Using Insider Language and Biblically Permissible Cultural and Islamic Forms

Similar to C3, however, biblically permissible Islamic forms and practices are also utilized (e.g., praying with raised hands, keeping the fast, avoiding pork, alcohol, and dogs as pets, using Islamic terms, dress, etc.). C1 and C2 forms avoided. Meetings not held in church buildings. C4 communities are comprised almost entirely of Muslim background believers. C4 believers, though highly contextualized, are usually not seen as Muslim by the Muslim community. C4 believers identify themselves as "followers of Isa the Messiah" (or something similar).

C5 Christ-Centered Communities of “Messianic Muslims” Who Have Accepted Jesus As Lord and Savior.

C5 believers remain legally and socially within the community of Islam. Somewhat similar to the Messianic Jewish movement. Aspects of Islamic theology which are incompatible with the Bible are rejected, or reinterpreted if possible. Participation in corporate Islamic worship varies from person to person and group to group. C5 believers meet regularly with other C5 believers and share their faith with unsaved Muslims. Unsaved Muslims may see C5 believers as theologically deviant and may eventually expel them from the community of Islam. Where entire villages accept Christ, C5 may result in “Messianic mosques.” C5 believers are viewed as Muslims by the Muslim community and refer to themselves as Muslims who follow Isa the Messiah.

C6 Small Christ-Centered Communities of Secret/Underground Believers

Similar to persecuted believers suffering under totalitarian regimes. Due to fear, isolation, or threat of extreme governmental/community legal action or retaliation (including capital punishment), C6 believers worship Christ secretly (individually or perhaps infrequently in small clusters). Many come to Christ through dreams, visions, miracles, radio broadcasts, tracts, Christian witness while abroad, or reading the Bible on their own initiative. C6 (as opposed to C5) believers are usually silent about their faith. C6 is not ideal; God desires his people to witness and have regular fellowship (Heb 10:25). Nonetheless C6 believers are part of our family in Christ. Though God may call some to a life of suffering, imprisonment, or martyrdom, he may be pleased to have some worship him in secret, at least for a time. C6 believers are perceived as Muslims by the Muslim community and identify themselves as Muslims (Travis 1998:407-408).

It is probably true to say that Evangelicals are divided between C4 and C5 models; in fact, this is what the current turmoil is about. It is still too early to accurately assess the results of this bold evangelical program. Innovative and prudent methods should be encouraged and carefully monitored

Individual Christians, Community, and Church

The purpose of contextualization is to communicate the gospel to particular peoples in thought forms and categories that are understood. Faithful missionary effort is empowered by the Holy Spirit who leads the seeker to conversion. Conversion leads to baptism and baptism has a dual function. It signifies

not only death and rebirth with Christ, but also entry into the church, the body of Christ.

The question that then inevitably follows is what to do with, and how best to care for the new member. Is membership in the visible Christian community intrinsic to conversion? It is hardly a serious issue in some societies, but it assumes immense proportions in some countries in which there is a dominant world religion.

A perusal of the "Country Surveys" in Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia* serves to acquaint the reader with striking evidence of the enormity of this issue. Barrett lists "Crypto Christians" in sixty-five countries and in some of these they constitute about a third of all Christians. This percentage is generally higher in rigidly Islamic countries, but is also a significant statistic in other countries of Asia. Crypto Christians do not have visible connections with a church. However, Barrett lists them as part of the "underground church" and not as nominal Christians. He describes them as "refusing to publicize their religious beliefs, or divulge them to the state, in order to protect their rights from hostile states" (Barrett 1983:5). He gives no further analysis of the phenomenon, no breakdown as to whether they live as loners in society, or what percentage are Christian Hindus or Christian Muslims in the temple or mosque, but, in fact, pray to Christ. These are largely the C6 type of Christian.

All of this constitutes an enormous missionary challenge. The dimensions and seriousness of the problem varies according to the society. There is abundant evidence that to bring Muslims immediately into a C1 or C2 church may have dire consequences in some countries. Significant numbers either revert or emigrate. Over the years I have seen quite a few references in the general missiological literature of the tendency for Muslim and Hindu converts to emigrate. The cumulative effect of this gives the impression that this is more commonly the case among Adventists than in most other communities. Tension between the Protestant conviction that membership in the church is intrinsically connected with conversion and commitment to Christ, on the one hand and the dangers of physical injury, legal disability, and social isolation on the other are very real in many circumstances.

The missionary dilemma of what to do with enthusiastic converts in such societies is not new. One thinks of de Nobili among the Brahmans, J. N. Farquhar of *Christ, the Crown of Hinduism* fame, and McGavran, also in India, who sought a solution in the homogenous unit principle which he eventually expanded into a major factor in his church growth theory. A more recent de-

bate between Lesslie Newbigin and M. M. Thomas serves to clarify the issues involved.⁴

Sociological surveys conducted in the 1960s indicated that thousands of Christians believed in "Jesus as the only God" in the major cities of India, though they had no visible connection with the Christian church. This was a surprising and shocking revelation at the time. Christian theologian Kai Baago picked up on the issue and asked, "Must Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims become Christians in order to belong to Christ?" Perhaps influenced by Farquhar and the Hindu belief that all religions are equally valid paths to the one unknowable God, Baago advocated that Christians, instead of withdrawing from Hinduism, should form a Hindu Christianity.

This issue was taken up in debate by Newbigin who had been a missionary in India for many years, served in Geneva as director of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism, and had recently returned as a missionary to Madras. A decade earlier Newbigin had written *The Household of God* which is as much an exposition of the church in the Scriptures as a theological study. His theological orientation is clearly stated at the outset.

The whole core of biblical history is the story of the calling of a visible community to be God's own people, His royal priesthood on earth, the bearer of His light to the nations. . . . There is an actual, visible, early company which is addressed as "the people of God," the "Body of Christ." It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. I think that we Protestants cannot too often reflect on that fact. He committed the entire work of salvation to that community (Newbigin 1954:20).

Newbigin maintained the following position throughout the debate,

This inward turning immediately and intrinsically . . . involves membership in a community. "The New Testament knows nothing of a relationship with Christ which is purely mental and spiritual, un-embodied in any of the structures of human relationship." The essential confession of every new convert embraces belief not only "in the finality of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, but also in the necessity of this community as part of the response to that revelation" (Hunsberger 1998:12).

Newbigin could not accept the concept of a "Hindu Christianity" or that of secret Messianic Hindu communities. He suggested in a lecture I heard that

such were secret only to the Christian community and not to the Hindus. He states forthrightly:

A form of the church that breaks no solidarities is impossible if there is genuinely an explicit link of faith in Jesus. If someone is religiously, culturally, and socially a Hindu and "at the same time, his allegiance to Christ is accepted as *decisive*, as—therefore—over-riding his obligations as a Hindu, this allegiance must take visible—that is social—forms. He must have *some* way of expressing the fact that he shares this ultimate allegiance with others—and these ways will have to have religious, social and cultural elements" (Hunsberger 1998:115).

While stoutly maintaining the above position regarding commitment to Christ and membership in the church, he was flexible regarding two subsequent matters. First, that the young church should have the freedom, in fact be encouraged, to adopt forms of worship that are culturally familiar and spiritually fulfilling. Second, that the church have the freedom to wrestle with matters of structure and order and make ethical decisions regarding local issues, provided, of course, that all of this be in harmony with the gospel and the values inherent in it.

Adventist ecclesiology differs somewhat from that of Newbigin, for his ecclesiology is grounded in an ontological conception of the "Body of Christ" whereas Adventist ecclesiology is more functional than ontological and grounded in the sense of being a specially called-out people with a specific message to proclaim. Newbigin, nevertheless, places great weight on the witnessing function of the church. I find myself in agreement with his fundamental affirmation of the intrinsic continuity between conversion, baptism, and union with the Christ-centered fellowship of faith which is the church. The value of the debate lies in the clarity with which the single issue of the necessity of being a fellow member of the community which is the body of Christ comes to the fore.

It has been argued that Newbigin stressed the intrinsic connection between conversion and membership with sharp decisiveness because of the willingness of Hindus to accept Christian Hindus, and that he was the harbinger of a radical call to Christians to come out of the temple. Having read many of his books, I doubt that this was the case—everywhere the centrality of the church stands out in his life and work. Newbigin enunciates a universal tenet of the Christian faith which is as applicable in the Muslim as in every other context. The early Jewish Christians in Jerusalem desperately needed the strength and support

that comes from mutuality, and so do those who convert to Christianity under difficult circumstances.

The old saying, "ecclesiology determines missiology" is not wide of the truth. Years ago, while certainly seeing the direct connection between the two in Catholic and some of the mainline missions, I doubted whether it really held for Adventists. I was inclined to elevate eschatology above ecclesiology. And I think there is validity to this if one thinks of ecclesiology in the generally accepted sense, for we have not paid a great deal of attention to ecclesiology in the classical ontological sense. However, the strong sense of being a remnant called out to perform a specific task toward the end of earthly time constitutes an ecclesiology of a special kind, one that emphasizes the work and witness of the church above ontological conceptualities. It is this, plus distinctive doctrines regarding the significance of the Sabbath and the priestly ministry of Christ, and to a lesser extent a lifestyle that reflects Christian values, that lies at the heart of the powerful Adventist sense of identity. It is this remnant concept that has informed almost everything about the structure and polity and mission of the church. And it is this remnant concept that Whitehouse and Darnell have used so effectively in calling Muslims to a distinctive sense of identity and mission.

Once the intrinsic continuity between conversion and membership is affirmed, the question then arises as to what kind of Christ-centered community most effectively nurtures and enables witness to compatriots and is at the same time sociologically possible? Again, this is an immensely complex matter which requires careful investigation and monitoring.

While, like Newbiggin, I have difficulty with indefinite Christian involvement in the mosque or temple and think in terms of distinct Christian communities (house churches) as the model to seek to realize, this kind of judgment must be left to those close to the situation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Suffice it to say that I rejoice at the efforts that are being made to reach these great population blocks and pray that God will guide and give wisdom to those so involved.

There is a powerful sense of mutuality and support in the *ummah* of Allah. And, if we are to draw Christians out of the mosque, we will have to equal or go beyond the Muslim's desire for and practice of prayer. In general, I am informed that Christian communities do not satisfy Muslim converts in this respect. This is a challenge to all of us.

Functions of Confessions of Belief

The Christian Church has never been without creeds or confessions of faith.⁵ There are several in the Scriptures beginning with the Shema of Deut 6:4, 5. Several of those in the New Testament, especially Rom 10:9, 10 and 1 Pet 3:18-22, are thought to have been baptismal creeds. The most extensive and beautiful creed in the New Testament is 1 Tim 3:16 which was probably recited or sung by the congregation on occasion. As the beliefs of the Pauline churches met resistance from the Jews within the church, and then from philosophically inclined Greek converts, the church felt constrained to develop more nuanced and extensive creeds. These have constituted an essential ingredient in the life and witness of the church and have fulfilled several important functions. In particular three of these functions seem to be of relevance to our discussion.

First, and most important, is the missional function of the confessions. Key articles define the essential beliefs of Christianity and help the church to articulate the faith. Second, from the earliest of days, confessional statements have been used to defend the beliefs of the church against real or imagined attacks. They identify and uphold the essential doctrines and standards of the church and in so doing serve to maintain unity of belief and purpose. Third, confessional statements have served to establish parameters which define one confessional body as over against another. They also define boundaries for purposes of inclusion and exclusion of communities and members. Territory without boundaries has no in or out, and there is no strength in an amorphous multitude.

To claim neutrality in matters regarding Christian confession displays some indifference and perhaps also a lack of certainty about what the Christian faith and church are all about. At the same time, it seems necessary to point to a certain kind of paradox which has always existed, but is now much more in evidence because of the diversity in unity of the worldwide church. As was manifest in the ministry of our Lord, there is both that which is particular and that which is universal in all confessional statements. All were written at a particular time and place and are couched in identifiable thought forms. At the same time all point to the universal truth of God and his purposes for human beings as revealed in Jesus Christ.

It is the particularity aspect of this paradox that has constituted the grounds for the fairly extensive ferment regarding the confessions among the younger churches, especially in Asia, during the past forty years. The major arguments

advanced by the younger churches have been, (1) that the faith needed to be expressed in categories that make sense in local cultures, and (2) that confessional statements should address issues peculiar to particular societies. It is argued that the categories of Western thought in which the creeds are couched do not fit local patterns of thought, and further that the issues of Europe are not applicable to local concerns. As a result, several new confessions have been drafted and accepted and there has been some revision of confessional statements. On balance, perhaps more attention has been paid to the drafting or re-drafting of catechisms in order to make them more effective in addressing local issues.⁶

In this discussion, several of the older churches have maintained that acceptance of the same confession by member churches of the world body is essential to unity. The counter claim has been that inasmuch as parts of the confession are likely to be misunderstood, the cause of unity is better served by revised or different statements that make the essential meaning clear. There is much to be said in favor of both positions. Two alternative solutions have been employed. In the first, the central tenets of the faith, what is essential to the essence of the gospel and what it means to be a Christian, are gathered together and distinguished from second order concerns (such as matters relating to church order and practice and local ethics) which may be reinterpreted so as to answer local needs. In the second, the confession of faith may be left intact as a universal witness, and the major focus of attention, at least early in the convert's experience, moved to catechisms. In these, the central tenets of the faith may be gathered together and explained in local thought forms. This may be followed by explication of subsidiary matters, which in turn may be followed by application of the gospel to local issues. I must confess that I leaned toward this solution, and embarked upon a process of critical contextualization in this direction before leaving Zimbabwe quite a few years ago.

The Adventist situation is not exactly parallel to that of the mainline churches. Early Adventists were influenced by the Christian Connection movement which was anti-creedal, anti-formalist, and anti-Trinitarian, and as late as 1872 affirmed, "We have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline aside from the Bible," (from the 1872 "Synopsis"). The disclaimers attached to the 1872 Synopsis indicate that it was primarily intended to define who Seventh-day Adventists were over against other Adventist communities and not designed in the first instance to secure uniformity within the church. It was not until 1931 that a statement of some eighteen fundamental beliefs was formally accepted and published. This had its origin in a request from missionaries in

Kenya who sought recognition by the Christian Council of Kenya, rather than out of concern for a confession to cement church unity. The long delay in formally accepting a statement of fundamental beliefs is testimony to the strong Adventist sense of identity. The statement of Fundamental Beliefs has been revised several times since, and completely redrafted (the 1980 statement), and has steadily been accorded greater weight in the life and witness of the church in spite of the introductory sentence which reads, "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Scripture."

As the introductory sentence also makes clear, the statement of Adventist fundamental beliefs owes less to the ecumenical creeds and Protestant confessions, (although it is more inclined in that direction than was the 1931 statement) than are most contemporary Protestant statements and is derived more from exposition of the Scriptures.

We now come to the use and acceptance of the Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs in the mission of the church. There is nothing of what is called *foundational theology* in the Fundamental Beliefs, i.e., nothing that starts before Scripture that seeks to demonstrate the reasonableness of the existence of God or account for the less-than-perfect human condition or to explore intimations of a consciousness of the divine or to show the reasonableness of revelation. The basis for acceptance of the fundamental statements is prior acceptance of the authority of Scripture. This is of particular significance when it comes to dealing with the mind-set of the great Asian religions. The early Christian creeds interacted with the contemporary mind-set in their world and served a missional function more effectively than do most contemporary confessions. This is due both to the nature of the confessions and of the wide conceptual and religious diversity in which the church seeks to bear witness.

The Adventist Church has a wonderful sense of identity—social scientists describe it, like the family, as a primary society. Religious belief defines reality and constitutes the basis on which important decisions are made. Within this context, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is an instrument that defines purpose and unites. It can certainly serve a missional purpose in communities which accept the authority of Scripture. However, in working with adherents of the great philosophical religions of Asia, it would seem to be necessary to start elsewhere.

Under such circumstances catechisms which start where the people are, [A Roman Catholic catechism for Africa starts, "Your heart knows there is a

God" (quoted from memory).] goes on to expositions regarding belief in God the Father and Jesus Christ, and the central truths of the gospel serve a highly useful purpose. It is the function of such catechisms to lead to understanding of the Christian faith, acceptance of the Scriptures as the revealed Word of God, of Christ as their personal Savior, and in due course to membership in the community of the church. In this way a bridge is built between the local and the universal. Acceptance of Adventist Fundamental Beliefs should grow along the way. In some societies, even though the pilgrim principle is powerful, this may be a slow process, because the convert may have formidable intellectual barriers to overcome. Even if there has been a dramatic conversion experience, the convert may have major adjustments of thought and life to make before the fundamental beliefs in their entirety are experientially helpful.

Conclusion

No attempt is made at a full summary; this paper is already somewhat repetitious. Principles intrinsic to the task of mission have been derived from the life and ministry of our Lord and the experience of the early church. Application of these to the task of spreading the message and establishing the church among the populations of the world religions is illustrated with reference to three significant and much discussed issues in relationship to mission among adherents of the great world religions: (1) the relationship of conversion to church membership and witness, (2) the extent to which identification and contextualization may be carried in view of the ever present tendency toward syncretism, and (3) debates between the older and younger churches regarding confessions of faith.

What significance does all of this have for the current concerns of the Adventist Global Mission undertaking? First, the recognition that many of the issues and obstacles we encounter as we seek to respond to the challenges of this particular sector of the missionary task have been, or are being, wrestled with by others. Much careful thinking and dedicated work has been expended on some of these issues and this constitutes a valuable source of information which may be of help to us. I find that most missiologists are quite open to frank discussion and even networking. We have the opportunity of learning from and building on the work of others and adding our own special approach.

Second, recognition of the diversity and complexity of the various missionary situations precludes the possibility of establishing overly restrictive guide-

lines. Translation from the general to the particular can only be properly made by those intimately involved in the local situation. Church leaders should be able to work together in full confidence and those in the field should be accorded the responsibility of making decisions regarding appropriate courses of action. Mutual planning and the free flow of information sustain both support and trust. It would seem that much can be achieved by small teams working together who seek the best information, experiment cautiously, constantly monitor programs, and who are willing to discontinue approaches producing adverse effects, and try alternate or modified methods. Above all, field practitioners need encouragement, support, and the prayers of all God's people.

The development of catechisms which start where the people are, and outline the cardinal beliefs of the Adventist Church in a way that engages local patterns of thought and concerns may be helpful. This requires a process of critical contextualization involving local leaders, lay people, and one or two who are well acquainted with the ethos and doctrine of the world church and its mission.

The challenge of inspiring and equipping all believers in Christ to become witnessing members of the church is great. Perhaps many will respond to this call if we can lead them to rewarding ways of bearing testimony. May God help us in achieving this.

Third, we recognize that all mission is the mission of God. God can open gateways where there are none, and turn the hearts of people to him. The entire church needs to be much more in prayer for these people and for those disciples who are commissioned to work among them. At times the magnitude and difficulty of the task and the restricted ports of entry constrain us to cry out, Who is equal to these things? But God has called his church to bear this witness and he will lead us on. Thus we press forward in faith and with the joy of our Lord in our hearts.

A Subscript

In a sense this is a typically Adventist paper. Perhaps because of the topic, perhaps because of who we are, it deals with the intellectual side of issues. But Christianity is more than correct belief. It also has to do with experience, the experience of believers meeting together, experience in prayer at the communion table, and experience with the Lord. It is experience that drives the well-springs of action. We should not, and may not, neglect the challenge of rational

communication of the message, but do we take the experiential dimensions of the Christian pilgrimage seriously enough, and do we adequately nurture it in others? I find a great challenge in this.

May God guide and bless all those who have dedicated their lives to him in this challenging mission.

Notes

¹I am indebted to Prof. Andrew Walls, who introduced this pattern of thought in a lecture.

²The tension in this case is different from the more usual tension internal to the principle of translation, i.e., between translation that portrays the meaning of the gospel with fidelity and a pattern of translation that distorts the meaning of the gospel and leads to syncretism. This will be discussed later in this paper.

³See articles by Phil Parshall, John Travis, and Dean Gilliland, 1998, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (October).

⁴Details of the debate are contained in chap. 5 in George R. Hunsberger, 1998, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit*, Eerdmans and *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22, no. 3 (July 1998):115.

⁵The term "creeds" is usually restricted to the ecumenical symbols. These are relatively brief and restricted to the essentials of the faith. "Confessions" is generally used in connection with statements of belief of the various confessional bodies, i.e., the Augsburg Confession.

⁶All of this has a fairly extensive history which we cannot recount here. See G. C. Oosthuizen, 1972, *Theological Battleground in Asia and Africa*. Hurst. See Interalia, 1966, *The South East Asia Journal of Theology* 8, nos. 1 & 2 (July/Oct).

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Chapter 9

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1999 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor's Note: At the conclusion of each year's Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 1999 three recommendations were prepared dealing with the fundamental beliefs and preparation for baptism, contextualized Adventist communities, and our mission and other Christians.

Fundamental Beliefs and Preparation for Baptism

Recommended 14 January 1999

We recognize that the Adventist statements of belief and practice such as the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, the Baptismal Vows, the *Church Manual* and even most series of Bible studies and evangelistic sermons were framed in the context of a relationship to other Christians. The mission to non-Christians demands that we understand and relate to these statements in new ways. New questions will be asked, and thus new methods of explanation must be sought. We affirm the validity of these statements of belief but recognize that their presentation and explication must be altered in order that the non-Christian may adequately understand our message, and we encourage the development of local Bible studies and teaching instruments.

The religious centers, along with front-line workers, must do the work of adapting the message of the Church to their specific targets in consultation with the larger church community, including missiologists, theologians, and administrators.

Baptismal Guidelines

In the preparation of individuals for baptism into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these sequential guidelines must all be followed:

1. Candidates must have an understanding of biblical teachings and a personal experience of salvation.
2. Candidates must be mentored by the present community of believers until this community is satisfied that the candidate has reached an adequate Christ-centered experience and a biblically-based faith.
3. The baptismal vow as set forth in the *Church Manual* must be taken as summarizing the minimum required beliefs and experiences for baptism.

Think it through: "Before baptism there should be a thorough inquiry as to the experience of the candidates. Let this inquiry be made, not in a cold and distant way, but kindly, tenderly, pointing the new converts to the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Bring the requirements of the gospel to bear upon the candidates for baptism" (Testimonies 6:96).

Fundamental Beliefs and Preparation for Baptism

*Statement As Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Administrative Committee and As Edited by the Biblical Research Institute
June and July, 2003*

Fundamental Beliefs and Non-Christians

The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is an expression of the Church's message in language that is meaningful to Christian communities. The challenge is to determine how to make this statement meaningful to societies where Christians are a minority or non-existent. The mission to non-Christians will raise new questions which are not addressed in the Fundamental Beliefs, and relevant biblical answers should be provided. The following suggestions could be of help when addressing this particular issue.

a. The way the Fundamental Beliefs are presented and the language used to present them must be carefully studied and selected in order to facilitate the comprehension of the Church's message by non-Christians. The development of locally-prepared Bible studies and teaching instruments is to be encouraged.

b. The task just described should be done at the religious study centers, with the assistance of front-line workers and in consultation with the church community, theologians, missiologists, and administrators.

c. The religious study center directors should refer local questions and concerns not addressed in the fundamental beliefs to the Office of Global Mission of the General Conference for study.

Baptismal Guidelines

In the preparation of new converts for baptism and membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these sequential guidelines must be followed.

a. A candidate must give clear evidence of a personal experience of salvation by faith in Christ and of a clear understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist message.

b. A candidate must be guided by the local community of believers until the community can testify that the candidate has reached an adequate knowledge and experience of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

c. The Baptismal Vow, as set forth in the *Church Manual*, must be taken as summarizing the minimum required beliefs and experiences for baptism.

Contextualized Adventist Communities

Recommended 14 January 1999

Traditionally the Adventist Church has faced great difficulties to produce regularly organized churches in many countries of the 10/40 Window. Such churches were often small and isolated. Growth was discouragingly slow. New believers sometimes reverted back to their old religion or sought relief through emigration, thus leaving the majority of the unreached peoples in the world without sustainable Adventist witness.

Recognizing these difficulties the Church has commissioned and encourages the Global Mission Centers to experiment with new approaches to evange-

lism in resistant environments. These efforts have led to the successful establishment of various messianic communities that provide a nurturing environment for the new believers without extracting them from their environment. While these communities have been quite successful in generating a sense of identity and mission, their shape often differs from traditional Adventist structures. Some of these communities may be transitional in passage toward full identity with the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, to be superseded as social and political conditions allow.

The freedom to shape the nurturing context for new believers in non-traditional ways is one of the vital elements of success where traditional church structures are not advisable. In these cases it is recommended:

1. That the new believers be taught from the beginning that there is a larger global community of believers that shares their commitment to God.
2. That a conscious effort be made to establish appropriate links to the existing regional or international structure of the Adventist Church without endangering the survival of the incipient community.
3. That leaders of these communities be brought into contact with the larger Adventist community, as circumstances permit, to ensure a growing awareness of the global mission of God's remnant.
4. That the Church seeks to provide appropriate support for those who are called to pioneer these approaches as these specialized missions can at times lead to temporary isolation and misunderstanding in the larger Adventist community.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Our Mission and Other Christians

Recommended 14 January 1999

The Church, as the community and sign of God's kingdom, has been called to embody God's love in the world through proclaiming God's everlasting gospel and calling people to trust and follow Christ in sincere worship, honest fellowship, committed discipleship, and humble service and witness.

Seventh-day Adventists believe it is God's desire that the Good News be preached to all people, that none should perish. We value all Christians who

proclaim Christ's saving power and those agencies that are lifting up Christ as part of God's plan for world evangelization. We consider all Christians to be our brothers and sisters in Christ, desire to treat them with love and respect, and seek opportunities to pray and fellowship with them.

In his providence God has, throughout history, directed persons and movements to emphasize special aspects of the divine message. Seventh-day Adventists believe that their task is to proclaim biblical truth in the setting of a prophetic message, urging preparation for Christ's second coming (Rev 14:6-12). The "everlasting gospel" is to be preached at this time "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue and people" (v. 6, see also Matt 28:18-20). Just as Christ did not limit the witness about himself to his immediate followers (Luke 9:49-50), Seventh-day Adventists assert that all Christian organizations should have freedom to carry out their special mission in every place.

While our mission is to the whole world, we recognize the special urgency to reach those who have not yet heard or who live where Christ's name may not be known. The Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches that each member has a biblical responsibility to proclaim the everlasting gospel. While the general church structure provides strategies and policies for mission, it recognizes that church members, congregations, and institutions plan and implement local mission initiatives.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come (Matt 24:14).

This statement was prepared 14 November 1996, at Andrews University by Bruce Bauer, Erich Baumgartner, Jon Dybdahl, Rudi Maier, Bruce Moyer, Russel Staples, Nancy Vyhmeister, Werner Vyhmeister (all from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary), and Glen Wintermeyer (Adventist Frontier Missions), under the leadership of Mike Ryan, Global Mission.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Chapter 10

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2000 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor's Note: At the conclusion of each year's Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2000 four recommendations were prepared dealing with relationships with world religions, the relationship between Adventism and Muslims, the relationship between Adventism and Hinduism, and the relationship between Adventism and Buddhism.

At the 2000 Global Mission Issues Committee no formal papers were presented, but there was discussion, and writing groups that worked on the four statements mentioned above.

Relationships With World Religions

Recommended 7 February 2000

As members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we rejoice that God loves and cares for his creation—every human being from every race, culture, and belief. We recognize that God has revealed himself in many ways, which include certain values and truths found in the major world religions.

While respecting the beliefs of people of other faiths, as believers in Jesus, we want to share important and unique truths revealed in the Holy Bible. We

want to do so in language and ways that are meaningful and understandable to people in their own cultural context.

We want to treat people with love and respect, and insist that no one should be forced or in any way coerced to alter their beliefs. We expect other religious bodies to respond in the same spirit. We welcome dialogue with all faiths because we believe God is calling people from every race and religion to faithfully serve him and reflect his character.

We look forward to the day when people from all nations, races, and cultures will gather together to worship God.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

A Statement of the Relationship Between Adventism and Muslims

Recommended 7 February 2000

Introduction

Adventists, like Muslims, believe that the Almighty God created all peoples for good relationships and to understand each other. This belief should be reflected in all encounters with people of other faiths. In this spirit Adventists seek cordial relationships with Muslims. While differences exist, Adventists believe that a relationship based on mutual respect and understanding rather than ignorance and antagonism benefits all. This brief statement aims to promote that understanding and respect.

We acknowledge and regret the misunderstandings that have existed as a result of injustices such as the crusades and some jihads. In contrast, Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to conflict, violence, intolerance, and coercion. We are an "end-time," world-wide movement of reconciliation that calls all people to prepare for the Day of Judgment.

General Attitudes Toward Life

Seventh-day Adventists share with Muslims the conviction that life is centered in God as the creator and sustainer of life, permeating every aspect of our existence. We both recognize humanity as God's stewards.

The Spiritual Life, Values, and Practices

Seventh-day Adventists recognize that Islam is one of the monotheistic faiths that traces its heritage back to Abraham. Submission to God, which is the meaning of the word Islam, is a desirable objective to be shared by all. Adventists see themselves as spiritual descendants of Abraham. Seventh-day Adventists share the strong common spiritual focus of Islam in preparation for the Last Day, the Day of Judgment, and the coming of Jesus (*Isa el Masih*). Adventists respect the piety and devotion to worship and prayer found in Islam. Seventh-day Adventists and Muslims place a high value on the family. Both teach personal honesty and integrity. Adventists share with Islam a common concern for avoiding anything that would destroy physical health or quality of life. Alcohol, gambling, and unclean meats are to be avoided. Muslim leaders have also issued statements forbidding tobacco and substance abuse.

Adventists recognize that personal faith is based on individual conscience and conviction. Adventists believe that there should be no coercion in religion, and that there should be respect for those of other faiths. We anticipate other religious bodies will respond in the same spirit of religious liberty.

Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventists recognize that there are areas of difference in belief, particularly in the area of God's handling of the sin problem and the details of his revelation of himself. Areas of difference are seen as opportunities for mutually respectful dialogue, for understanding, honest inquiry, and evaluation.

Adventists encourage active dialogue and sharing with Muslims particularly in those areas of common faith and practice which can mutually encourage spiritual growth of all. It is our desire that this brief statement will lead Adventists and Muslims to respect each other as spiritual seekers and will lead to productive dialogue.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

A Statement of the Relationship Between Adventism and Hinduism

Recommended 7 February 2000

Adventists affirm that people of all nations, cultures, and religions are God's children by creation. We affirm that people of all human civilizations, cultures, and belief systems deserve respect from those of other cultures and belief systems.

The Hindu belief system has an elaborate and highly developed philosophical structure. We recognize that this system developed together with one of the oldest and most highly sophisticated civilizations of history. Christianity has also been a part of this civilization for 2,000 years.

We appreciate that the civilization that has developed in the Indian sub-continent has produced a culture that is deeply religious, spiritually aware, and one that places high value on the devotional life. We appreciate that this culture has a value-system that gives high priority to the family, the nurture and discipline of children, and all interpersonal relationships. Adventists affirm and teach the importance of religious devotion and the cultivation of family values.

While recognizing that there are differences between Adventism and Hinduism, we hold certain values that are similar to those of Hindu culture, such as the respect for human life and the concept of non-violence in human relationships. With Hindus we share ideals of wholistic living, an emphasis on healthful living, and abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. With them we emphasize the value of a vegetarian diet.

We recognize that many Hindus hold Jesus Christ and his moral, ethical teaching in high regard and accept him as an incarnation of deity. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical emphasis on the grace of God, the assurance of forgiveness of sin in this life, and the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for sinners are concepts that can be highly valued by the people of this great civilization.

We affirm the human right of India's spiritual teachers to proclaim their religious and philosophical beliefs wherever they choose. We expect the same privileges.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

A Statement of the Relationship Between Adventism and Buddhism

Recommended 7 February 2000

Introduction

Adventists believe that all people were created in the image of God. This belief should be reflected in all encounters with people of other faiths. Adventists seek cordial relationships with Buddhists. While real differences will always exist, Adventists believe that a relationship based on understanding and respect rather than ignorance and antagonism benefits all. This brief statement aims to promote that understanding and respect.

Understanding Buddhist/Adventist relationships is challenging because of the diversity found both in Christianity and Buddhism. Christianity's three main branches—Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism—are paralleled by the three major branches of Buddhism—Hinayana or Southern Buddhism, Mahayana or Northern Buddhism, and Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism—which are at least as diverse. Buddhism's three main branches divide further into hundreds of sects as does Christianity. Adventism is a part of Protestant Christianity. While Seventh-day Adventists manifest some minor behavioral variations in different parts of the world, the Church is somewhat uniform as a whole.

General Attitude Toward Life

Adventists and Buddhists believe that the ideal life is carefully lived and that doing good is essential. Religion is central to life and is to be taken seriously. Failure to do so brings unpleasant results which affect this life and beyond. Religion is a benefit to society and contributes to order, peace, harmony, and happiness for people.

Ethics and Morals

Buddhism, like Adventism, sees ethical, moral behavior as being essential to religion. The eight-fold path of Buddhism really is a statement of ethics—what should and should not be done. Proper ethical behavior is crucial

to the future life. In this Adventists also agree, even though the reasons for the behavior differ.

Specific things about Buddhism appeal particularly to Adventists. Buddhists in general are pacifists and normally avoid war. They do not believe in killing people (or even animals). This fits well with the Adventist respect for human life and belief in non-combatancy.

Buddhists also believe vegetarianism is ideal. While their reasons differ, Adventists and Buddhists both see value in abstaining from eating flesh. Both also believe in abstinence from alcoholic beverages and addictive drugs.

Spirituality/Religious Life

Buddhists take seriously the spiritual life. For most Buddhists, meditation is a key practice as evidenced by the fact that many Buddhist sects are differentiated not so much on variances in belief, but rather on diverging practices of meditation.

Adventists also take seriously piety and devotion to worship, meditation, and prayer as acts of commitment to a life of faith. Adventists and Buddhists can find common ground through an emphasis on the spiritual life and prayer.

Beliefs and Doctrines

Comparing beliefs and doctrines is difficult for two main reasons. First, for Adventists doctrines and beliefs are clearly defined and central to self-identity. For Buddhists the role of doctrine is less central and their definition is less detailed because of their emphasis on philosophical concepts, ethical behavior, and the spiritual life.

Central to Buddhist beliefs are: the Buddha, the monkhood, and the teaching (dharma or truth), and the "four noble truths":

1. All of life is suffering
2. Suffering comes from desire
3. You get rid of suffering by getting rid of desire
4. You get rid of desire by following the eight-fold path of Buddhism

Underlying Buddhist beliefs and practices are certain basic philosophical concepts such as Monism (or pantheism) and reincarnation. Seventh-day Adventism sees its self-identity defined in a specific detailed statement of belief based on Scripture.

The second comparison is difficult because Adventism begins with a personal God, while Buddhism does not mention God. Buddhism starts with the human condition, while Christianity starts with God's revelation.

In agreement with Buddhists, Adventists believe that human beings do indeed suffer. This is common ground where dialogue can begin.

Conclusion

Our desire is that this brief statement will lead Adventists and Buddhists to take each other seriously as sincerely religious people, creating a basis for productive dialogue. Adventists believe that Buddhists should be free to practice and propagate their religion according to their conscience. Buddhists can grant the same freedom to Adventists.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Chapter 11

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THE CENTRALITY OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY TO WORLD MISSION

WALTER DOUGLAS

April 11-12, 2001

To be or not to be a community is not an option for the church. By its calling and function, the church is the whole community of persons drawn together by Christ through the Spirit, to embody and proclaim God's love and grace for a seeking world. This view of the church is clearly taught in Scripture. As one reads the New Testament, one is impressed by the fact that the word most frequently and expressively used to describe the nature and function of the church is *koinonia*. What is interesting and fascinating about this word is its amazing range and depth of meaning. It is used more than fifty times in the New Testament alone. In its root form it is variously translated as "that which is held in common, community, communion, fellowship, sharing, participation, partnership, generous."

Community in this sense means having a part in something in which others have a part, consciously sharing something we hold in common, a life consciously grounded in a common element; one faith, one Lord, one hope, one Spirit.

Indubitably, in the minds of the early Christians, beginning with Jesus and the apostles, living in community was central to world mission. As the vehicle

of God's redemptive concern, the Christian community functions in two important and integrated forms. As the gathered community, it meets for fellowship, refreshing, and revitalization to nurture and sustain its internal life. As the scattered community, it is sent into the world as witnesses to the transforming powers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In short, the Christian community is essentially a missionary community and depends for its integrity and vitality on how well it fulfills its mission in and to the world. One of the blessings God has generously bestowed on this community is the gift of diverse cultures with their varied languages, memories, and ethnicities. And the glue that holds such a diverse and multicultural community together is God's enduring love as revealed in Jesus Christ and the community's commitment to world mission. Indeed this commitment to world mission defines who Christians are and their reason for existence. Furthermore, the quality of life and the principles that guide Christian community distinguish its role and function locally and globally. The biblical concept of community and living in community rejects the notion that this is a call for isolated saintliness or a solitary greatness as some religious organizations believe and practice. On the contrary the Bible teaches that living in community is a call to the church to be involved in the life of the world in every possible way without compromising its integrity or sacrificing its essential faith and mission. Metaphors such as a "light of the world," "the salt of the earth," "the city on a hill," and "the harvest" all describe the Christian community in interaction with the world. How, in practical terms, could this be done? That is to say, how is living in community central to world mission?

Consider the following priestly model as one way of getting to the question. Douglas Hall, in his provocative study, *Has the Church a Future*, argues that the Christian community must understand itself and its function as a priestly community. The priestly life of the community is demonstrated in its sense of commitment to the world. Hall states: "If that sense of commitment is really the context of the church's priestly activity (including its worship), it will help prevent the sin that has plagued it from the onset: its tendency to segregate the church from the world" (Hall 1980:123).

To grasp fully the deep sense of the priestly model, we need to remind ourselves, that the word "priestly" is not used in the catholic sense, a meaning that is vehemently rejected in certain Protestant circles.

In this paper, the priestly model is reminiscent of the Hebrew meaning of the word. The Old Testament uses the priestly concept always in the sense of representation. It was used as a description of the high priestly role of the He-

brew priests in representing the community before God and God to the community. It is also the word that best describes Christ's ministry in the Garden of Gethsemane and in the heavenly sanctuary. In Gethsemane Christ was not there on his own behalf. He was there pleading humanity's cause before God. He was there for the world. "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done" (Matt 26:36-46). Both Christ and the Old Testament priests are before God not on their own behalf, but on behalf of the community. Christ represents sinful, broken humanity before God, and he represents God's love, compassion, care, and justice to the world.

This is the pattern for the Christian community's involvement in world mission. We do not only represent the crucified and risen Christ in and to the world; we also represent broken sinful humanity before God.

A community that loves and follows its Lord will be involved in the life of the world, just as Christ was involved. This was and remains the incarnational model that calls us to a deep level of commitment to world mission. The Christian community will understand its priestly role as central to world mission and consciously, bravely, and courageously enter into the human quest and struggle for love, justice, righteousness, hope, and the promise of a better world. In short, it will stand in solidarity, service, and sacrifice with suffering, estranged humanity with the hope of bringing them the Good News of God's transforming love and grace, while at the same time sharing its goods in concrete ways. Incarnational witness is at times difficult, even risky, for the Christian community to so engage the world. The difficulty, in part, lies in our perception of what mission to the world represents.

Mission to and in the world is much more than getting the gospel out to people. It involves standing in solidarity with those among whom we are trying to represent Christ. If this is understood, it produces quite a different idea of mission from the one that has prevailed in much of our preaching, teaching, and writing.

The mission situation is not rooted in the situation of the moment, or in simply relieving the burden of those who are trapped in suffering, oppression, guilt, and sin. The mission to the world is rooted in the gospel itself. And the Christian community can remain true to its mission only if it intentionally structures itself in that society where it performs its services. In this way it will be challenged to reflect on its life, and relieve itself of all that does not or cannot contribute to mission. Mission then becomes the orientation of the com-

munity. To be present with people in a realistic way is essential to our task of taking the gospel into all the world (see Hoekendijk 1966).

The gospel creates the community, while the community is the expression of the message. Christian community then remains central to mission because it is the form of a new society of women and men who are bearers of a distinctive quality of life. Here is the theological root of the new understanding of Christian community in the context of world mission.

To believe that "God so loved the world, that He gave His son," and not to be caught up into his self-giving love is implicitly to deny that he gave. Just as the love of God has a double movement, inwards into his own being, and outwards towards his world, so the Christian community is to be filled with love towards its own members and towards all who are yet "outside." Herein lays the Reformation concept of the community "gathered" and the church "scattered." It is constrained by love and its pledge to represent that love in the world. The Christian message has taught us to care. Caring is the greatest thing in mission. Caring matters. The Christian community is that body or fellowship that lives to tell and to show how much God cares. If the care of God is to lay hold of people it must do so through people who care. The Christian community in the context of world mission will distinguish itself as a community that reaches out to people without regard or consideration of race, economic status, religious orientation, or national identity. Something will shine through with a light that makes people ask about the source of our faith, hope, and love. There is a special quality about the character of that community as a living witnessing fellowship.

The special character is in its message, and, in this case, the medium is the message. It is what we call the gospel, the astounding Good News that God cares. The ringing assurance that, "God so loved the world that he gave his only son," carries tremendous power. He cares for every soul on the face of the earth. And He will go on caring. Telling and demonstrating this story must be our passion. This was the way the New Testament and early Christian community lived (see Acts 4:32f). For the early church, mission involved the twin notions of *koinonia* and *kerugma*—community and message or movement. This was their passion. And through the power of God, they turned the world upside down.

In a little town of nearly 2,000 people in Grenada, the Adventist Church was well-known and highly regarded as a caring community. It all started when a few people suddenly realized the central role of the community of faith as a

missionary community. They made a beginning by addressing the needs of the aging, and by starting programs to help repair the homes of those who were poor. They demonstrated a capacity to care that they did not know they possessed. Digging wells, helping children to learn, working with unwed parents, and sharing their goods in concrete ways with the needy was all practiced in that community. Such caring caught the imagination and interest of the people, and the church's mission spread from village to village because of a caring, compassionate church community. We can never rest content to tread the safe and conventional paths of mission to and in the world. There are times when the Christian community must take its courage in both hands and be adventurous, bold, and risky. We may send missionaries to Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America but when the elementary rights of people are rejected or denied because of race, ethnicity, culture, or economic status in the interest of playing it "safe," or in the name of convenience or culture or worst of all Christianity, then some protest from the Christian community calling for better things must be made if we are not to betray our mission or invalidate the claims of our faith.

If the community which claims and proclaims Jesus Christ as the foundation and head of its mission in the world does not speak and act for humanity which is God's; if we adjust our message and mission to accommodate injustice, and suffering, then we are not representing Christ. With the church's recovery, in recent years, of the concept that mission is of the essence of the church's life, and that it exists for mission, the Christian community is challenged to view its role and function in the world in a decisive way as it has never done in the past.

One contemporary theologian framed this concept with the following words:

The church is the people of God and will give an account of itself at all times to the God who called it into being, liberated it, and gathered it. It is therefore, before the divine forum that it will reflect upon its life and the form which this life takes, what it says and what it does not say, what it does and what it neglects to do.

But the church is at the same time under obligation to human kind. Consequently, it will at all times render an account to men and women about the commission implicit in its faith and the way it is fulfilling that commission. It will reflect on its life and the expression of its life in the forum of the world (Mollmann 1977:4).

The Christian community in its attempt to seek and to save those it believes should be brought into a saving relationship with Christ, has to be realistic

about the nature of its mission and the challenges that mission presents in a rapidly changing world. In my view global mission, by its very nature and definition, necessitates taking seriously not only the spiritual well-being of non-Christians, but the very context in which "they live and move and have their being." It has to be total mission, otherwise the church will not be carrying out its mandate as God intended.

Conclusion

I have tried to show in this paper that the centrality of Christian community to world mission is revealed in the priestly model of representation. Mission necessarily involves pleading humanity's cause before God. It takes its cue from the ministry of Jesus, especially the incarnation, his Gethsemane experience, and his heavenly ministration in the sanctuary.

The Christian community, in order to truly represent God to humanity and humanity before God, has to take account from what obtains in society. If the Christian community claims to speak for God and I believe it does, then it is under obligation to be committed to every aspect of human life. This is not to argue that the church should find solutions to all of humanity's cries and needs. Practically speaking that is not possible. But showing compassion, care, concern, and doing whatever it could to represent God is in fact central to its mission in any situation. Indeed that is its mission. Again Mollmann's insight is quite illuminating. He states: "What is required is not adroit adaptation to change social conditions but the inner renewal of the church by the Spirit of Christ, the power of the kingdom" (Mollmann 1977:23).

To be sure, our understanding and practice of Christian community in the context of world mission must be grounded in the clear and firm conviction of the theological doctrines of the incarnation and the cross. It must draw its motivation, mandate, and strategy from the relationship between Christ, the world, and the church. We are called to listen to what God says and do what he tells us to do. Our work in the world has to be carried out in harmony with Christ's teaching example, and as such must be Christo-centric both from above and from below. We are to ensure that it is practical and consistent with his method for reaching the people in ways that will encourage them to want to follow him

Let us, however, warn ourselves against an undue dependence on strategy, planning, and hard work. Our human self-sufficiency will not bring greater

success than a total dependence on the Spirit who teaches us all we should do in order to reach people with God's love and care. Our confidence must never be in our abilities. It has to be in God. His grace alone enables us to face our task in the world with confidence and hope. Through Christ, God has promised to complete what he has begun.

In summary, I would like to suggest the following five points of what constitutes a Christian community in the context of world mission. These are by no means exhaustive.

First, the community must be rooted in the unconditional acceptance by God for all. Preaching, worship, and service should reinforce the proclamation of God's grace and reflect the spontaneity of the gospel.

Second, the community should be inclusive and organized for a ministry of mutuality.

Third, people should be accepting of one another, free to acknowledge weakness, eager to listen to each other, and encourage each other without incrimination.

Fourth, the mission of that community should create righteousness in society and it should include a strong commitment to overcome all forms of discrimination. We hope such a community will see itself as an experiment in grace, where God's vision for humanity is being lived out now.

Fifth, the worship patterns, manner of decision making, structure, and educational programs should reflect the strength and needs of the diverse ethnic, racial, and gender groups that comprise our community.

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Chapter 12

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SPIRITUAL POWERS

LUKA T. DANIEL

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When I was much younger, I watched a magician conjure up a plate of rice which appeared to have come from no where by invoking what he called “the ninety-nine devils of India.” Are there such spiritual powers? My dictionary seems to give an affirmative answer. First it defines the word “spiritual,” as “pertaining to the spirit or soul, as distinguished from the physical nature, . . . pertaining to spirits or to spiritualists; supernatural or spiritualistic, . . . pertaining to the mind or intellect” (*Webster's Electronic Dictionary and Thesaurus* 1994, s.v. “spiritual”) Incidentally, the Scriptures speak of three types of spirits: “the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:9),¹ “spirits of demons” (Rev 16:14), and “the spirit of man” (1 Cor 2:11).

For the purpose of this paper, the best definitions of the word “power” are found in the Bible itself. Power is generally translated from the Hebrew word *koach* in the Old Testament (Exod 32:11) and in the New Testament power is generally translated from three Greek words, namely, *dunamis*, *exousia*, and *energia*. However, while *dunamis* is translated as “power” in Rom 1:16, *exousia* is translated as “authority” in Matt 28:18 and *energia* as “energy” in Col 1:29. The English word “dynamite” is derived from the Greek word *dunamis*. Thus Rom 1:16 would literally read, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the

dynamite of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

The basic power of God is revealed in his word (Heb 4:12) and the power of Satan is death (Heb 2:14). But Deut 18:5 explains that humankind has the power of choice, and it is clear from Rom 8:16 and Luke 22:3 that our minds can be influenced by God or by Satan. For example, when Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah, “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), Jesus commended him for allowing God to speak through him (Matt 16:17). However, we read later in (Matt 16:23) how Jesus sharply rebuked Peter by saying, “Get behind me, Satan,” when Peter tried to prevent the Savior from doing what he came from heaven to do, namely, to die for the remission of our sins. Thus, the use of our power of choice plays a significant role in the use or misuse of spiritual powers.

Gift of the Spirit

Before the Messiah left, he promised to send “another Comforter . . . the Spirit of truth” or “Holy Spirit” (John 14:16-18, 26). This baptism or coming of the Spirit took place as promised on the Day of Pentecost, according to Acts 2. Peter, who played a leading role in that memorable event, asserted that we normally receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit” at the time of water baptism (Acts 2:38). From the time the Spirit comes to each of us, he is expected to dwell in us, to guide our thoughts and actions, and prepare us for the kingdom of glory. Thus Paul warns, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30).

Satan imitates the Holy Spirit, but there are clear differences. The indwelling Holy Spirit operates as a single being, but Satan usually employs a number of demons. For example, Jesus cast “seven demons” out of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2) and a “mob of demons” out of the mad man he met in the region of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:9, 15 TEV). Similarly, the Holy Spirit “fills” individuals (Eph 5:18), allowing them the free use of their will, while Satan “possesses” the individual (Mark 1:23), allowing little or no freedom of choice. The Holy Spirit quits peacefully (1 Sam 16:14), but demons never leave without a fight (Luke 4:15; 9:42).

Spiritual Gifts

God gives people natural talents and also enables others to develop certain skills later in life. But God also gives spiritual gifts as mentioned in Rom 12, 1 Cor 12, and in the parable of the talents in Matt 25. God is a good God, and the gifts that come from him are good and are for the building up of the body of Christ. When Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and God's power came upon him, he "went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil" (Acts 10:38).

Popular Gifts

When Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, he received three major spiritual gifts: the gifts of preaching, teaching, and healing. It is clear from texts like Matt 4:23-25 that, of the three gifts, healing was the most popular among Jews and non-Jews alike. Jesus was literally mobbed to the point that he had to withdraw from the crowds. After Pentecost, the apostles also became popular because of the miracles of healing that they were enabled to do by the Spirit (Acts 5:12-15). It should be noted, however, that Jesus performed miracles only to meet particular needs and not just to satisfy curiosity; otherwise he would have performed miracles on the demand of Satan or his agents, the Pharisees. After all, John the Baptist never performed a miracle (John 10:41). Yet many people flocked to him for baptism. Of course the conversion of a soul is the greatest miracle that can ever be performed, because, among other things, it is the only miracle that sets all of heaven rejoicing.

Another spiritual gift that was popular in the Early Church was speaking in tongues. The tongues the apostles spoke on the day of Pentecost were recognized by people from about sixteen different nations. Some were moved to exclaim, "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our own native language?" (Acts 2:7, 8). Speaking in tongues became so popular thereafter that the Corinthian Church developed some gibberish popularly called "unknown tongues" (1 Cor 14:2 KJV), probably because they were enshrouded in "mysteries." Certainly, the knowledge of more than one language enhances one's gospel ministry among peoples of other cultures as is implied in 1 Cor 14:18. But even though Paul was a linguist, yet he declared, "In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor 14:19).

Today, many preachers of the prosperity gospel insinuate that ministry is faulty or incomplete at best if it is void of signs and wonders. Some "saints" assert that if you cannot speak in tongues, you are not born again. Christ's priority list remains the same today, namely, teaching, preaching, and healing. Thus, signs and wonders remain only as an accompaniment to teaching and preaching at God's discretion. Paul also followed this format. For instance, in the list of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12:28 miracles come after preaching and teaching, and speaking in tongues comes at the very bottom of the list. Ellen G. White drives home this maxim by the following warning, "The world will not be converted by the gift of tongues, or by the working of miracles, but by preaching Christ crucified" (White 1923:424). The gospel has power to change a demon possessed person like Mary Magdalene from an immoral sinner into the very first person Christ revealed himself to after his resurrection. Gospel power can transform a terrorist and a sinner like Saul of Tarsus into Paul, God's chief apostle to the Gentiles.

Counterfeit Gifts

The bad news is that the Devil easily counterfeits many of the popular spiritual gifts by giving power to mediums, magicians, witches, and astrologers. Remember the trouble the magicians and astrologers of Egypt gave Moses. Thereafter, God instructed Moses to decree that such evil people should not be found in Israel (Deut 18:9-12). So when Saul became the first king of Israel, he got rid of the witches and wizards in Israel (1 Sam 28:3). However, when God's Spirit left King Saul, he patronized one of the few remaining witches who had gone underground and asked her to bring forth the prophet Samuel who had stopped communicating God's will to Saul even before his death. The crucial point in this story is that when the witch told the king that what she saw was "an old man," Saul "perceived that it was Samuel" (1 Sam 28:14). This may partially explain the experts' opinion that "while [traditional healers] rely on some supernatural means for some of their cures, many so-called witch doctors among African or American tribes combine a sound knowledge of herbal medicine and subtle psychological techniques and insights which are frequently highly effective" (*Encyclopedia International* 1972, s.v. "traditional healers"). No wonder those who consult witches and other mystics or psychics often exclaim, "It works!" Here is where the problem lies—in people's perception.

In its global mission the Adventist Church is faced with the great challenge of how to meet the strong perceptions held by adherents of the various world religions. These religions generally accept the existence of a Supreme God, yet in practice many of their believers rely on supernatural powers to guide their lifestyle. Animists, for instance, believe that everything in nature, animate and inanimate, has a spirit or soul. Hence, many tribes in our world worship trees, stones, or animals. In animism sin is not well defined and salvation is attained from sacrifices to lesser spirits in order to appease the Supreme Spirit through those sacrifices. In Hinduism, forgiveness is not necessary because sin is an illusion. Nirvana comes through meditation and with time, and through a process of reincarnation, humanity may ultimately escape the cycles of rebirth. Similarly, Buddhism, a reformed type of Hinduism, relies heavily on meditation as the solution to problems here and hereafter. For the Buddhist, through meditation, God is abandoned in favor of the gods of desire developed in oneself.

The Adventist Church is also confronted by how to witness to the two monotheistic world religions that are closely related to Christianity, namely, Judaism and Islam. Judaism teaches salvation by works as indicated by Christ's list of rebukes to the Jewish leaders (Matt 23). In practice, there is also a mystical aspect of the use of some verses of the book of Psalms, the so-called sixth and seventh Books of Moses. Some believe in these verses as the source of magical secrets, of miracle working holy charms, and as powerful seals and talismans.

In Islam there is also an important element of belief in salvation by works, even though God (Allah) is often referred to as most Gracious, most Merciful, and All-forgiving. Yet on the day of judgment one's deeds will be weighed in the balances against one's misdeeds. Those whose deeds outweigh their misdeeds will go to paradise. But those whose misdeeds weigh more than their good deeds will be sent to hell (Al-Araf 7:8, 9). Mysticism in Islam, introduced by the Sufis, finds expression among the Javanese mystics of Indonesia, the dervishes of Turkey and India, and the Marabouts of North and West Africa. These Muslim mystics write special verses of the Qur'an on a slate, then sell them as charms or amulets. They wield considerable power in the *ummah* or Muslim community.

People consult witch doctors among the American tribes or visit one of the psychics among the middle- and upper-class residents of southern California, which one psychic called the "psychic capital of the world" (Bristol 1977:35). Others could meet with a "juju" or "voodoo" priest in West Africa or with an

astrologist or a futurologist at the “psychic center” in north London (Interest in the Occult Growing 1985:7). In our day people sell their consciences to a false prophet, a false Christ, or a faith healer. Some play around with those who mix mysticism with religion, like the Marabout in Islam and the enlightened New Agers. In all these instances the story of King Saul vividly points out that the heart of the problem in witchcraft in any form is closely tied to the perception of the victim. This may explain the scriptural assertion, “As he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov 23:7 NKJV). This assertion is expanded by Jesus in the first part of his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5). Ellen G. White further reveals that “sickness of the mind prevails everywhere” and that “nine tenths of the diseases from which men suffer have their foundation here” (1897, 1898:149). The deceiver often identifies wrong perceptions held by misguided individuals and is smart enough to exploit their misuse of the power of the mind to his advantage.

Belief in these charlatans and support for them is on the increase as surveys and polls reveal. For instance, a 1976 poll involving the interview of 1,536 adults in more than 300 localities in the United States indicated that more than 90 percent of people under the age of 30 could identify their astrological sign. Sadly, the report concluded that “there was no significant difference between churchgoers and non-churchgoers” (News Briefs 1976:48). More recent statistics (1990) reported by Elder George Vandeman, the founder of the It Is Written television program, reveal a worsening situation. Elder Vandeman, who dismissed astrology as a “bad science” and “simple guess work,” wondered why people still believed in it more than “at any time since the Renaissance.” The veteran evangelist went on to reveal that 1,200 of the 1,700 newspapers in the US carried horoscope columns and that 10,000 full-time and 175,000 part-time astrologers conducted a thriving business (Vandeman 1990:18).

This reminds me of what a high government official from the Republic of Benin in West Africa told a BBC reporter a few years back on why his government legalized the voodoo religion in the country. The official openly said that the government’s move was to stop what he called “the public hypocrisy,” because he claimed that the average Benin citizen stopped by a voodoo priest on his or her way to or from church or the mosque. This is shameful, but it is a fact of life all over Africa and in the so-called third world. Sadly, in both of these unfortunate realities Adventists are not excluded. “Within the Adventist Church, along with recent theological crises has come among some, a longing for new evidence of supernatural intervention” (McDowell 1987:4). As a

church, Adventists must proffer solutions to this problem of relying on spiritual powers that originate with any source other than God.

Windows of Approach

Christians must present the truth as it is in the Scriptures, and falsehood will eventually fall away. As mentioned above, distorted perceptions are also found among members of the Christian churches. Christianity also needs to set her house in order first, because she cannot give what she does not have. Those who have an obsession for popular spiritual gifts like miracles should be reminded of Christ's warning that his followers should not go to anyone claiming to be a wonder-working prophet or christ, since such miracles might look real enough "to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt 24:24 NKJV).

Our message to the Jews should come from the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Jewish people need to know that no amount of works can save them, for God looks down from heaven and finds no one doing anything good, not even one (Ps 14:2, 3). Ps 91 is one of the texts in the Bible that assure God's people of his protection and care for them. Nowhere in the Scriptures is anyone told to have anything to do with charms. It should be made abundantly clear to both Jews and Christians that God is not in the business of producing spectacular displays. Elijah was given a vivid picture of this fact on Mount Horeb where God passed before him, not in the scary storm, earthquake, or the wild fire, but in "a still small voice" (1 Kgs 19:12 NKJV). This may explain how God operates, "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty" (Zech 4:6).

Similarly, there are key texts in the Qur'an that we could use to approach Muslims. Muslims also accept Jesus as the Messiah, even though they deny his divinity and his role as the Savior of humankind. The third area of common ground Christians share with Muslims is in the area of temperance. It is important to note that Islam is the largest non-Christian religion. Last year (2000), Islam claimed 1.2 billion followers, second only to Christianity with 1.9 billion (Religion in the News 2001:20).

Another excellent text in the Qur'an that we could use to persuade Muslims to free themselves from the fear of demons by relying on God's protection, and which seems to agree with Ps 91:1-8, is Al-Falaq 113:1-5. It reads, "Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of Daybreak; From the evil of that which He created; From the evil of the darkness when it is intense, And from the evil of malignant

witchcraft, And from the evil of the envier when he envieth (Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall's Translation).

As for animists, let us invite them to simpler forms of worship without fear of either living or dead souls. In place of the innumerable intermediaries they appeal to by expensive sacrifices and other rituals, Christianity should attract them with the concept of accepting "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men" (1 Tim 2:5). Jesus, the ultimate ransom will liberate animists from the countless spirits which they very much fear, and it will also free them from the expenses of buying animals, and in some cases, offering human sacrifices that may even include their own relatives.

Emphasis on meditation is a good launching pad for witnessing among Hindus and Buddhists. Christians could use Ps 55:17 or 1 Thess 5:17 which encourage continual prayer, morning, noon, and night. Hindus and Buddhists should be led to understand that instead of aiming at emptying themselves or self-abandonment, the goal of true meditation should be to become filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18), in order to ensure proper guidance.

The most difficult people to approach with the gospel, in my opinion, are the humanists and those who embrace conceptual syncretism such as New Agers. As a child of postmodernism, New Age "denies history, time, the God of the universe, and the ultimate meaning of the Cross," on the one hand, and on the other hand, it "offers a religious mystique in a charming garb: horoscopes, meditations, crystals, and Eastern mysticism," and is rightly described as a "pseudo-religion (Fraga 1997:10-12). A thorough study of their beliefs may help us identify a friendly point that will assist us in reaching their hearts. Then we can, through the aid of the Holy Spirit, lead them to realize the truth in the following admonition from Paul, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate' For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength" (1 Cor 1:18, 19, 25).

The Fruit of the Spirit

Incidentally, both the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy say that there will soon be a repeat of Pentecost that will be preceded by a counterfeit revival. So we

must be sure to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). All claimants must pass the four major Bible tests of a genuine messenger of God. Normally, their prophecy must be fulfilled (Deut 18:22), their message must not contradict the Holy Scriptures (Isa 8:20), they should not deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:2), and above all their lifestyle must comply with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures (Matt 7:20). Even though each one of the four tests is important and every claimant must pass all of them, yet the one that is the most crucial is the last one which states that the genuineness of true messengers shall be known “by their fruits.” Fruits here has a double meaning, namely, the messenger’s lifestyle (Matt 7:21-23), and the type of converts produced through them must also reflect true repentance (Matt 3:8). Thus, guesswork, oratory, and false declarations (the first three tests) can easily deceive human beings. But any attempt to deceive in the area of the fourth test (one’s lifestyle) will not stand the test of time.

Therefore, in our direct and indirect witnessing, emphasis should not be on spiritual gifts, but on bearing the fruit of the Spirit. As it has been pointed out above, spiritual gifts can be easily faked by both demons and humans, but not so with the fruits of the Spirit, which include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22, 23).

Paul summarizes this whole subject by presenting striking contrasts between love, the first in the list of the fruits of the Spirit, and popular spiritual gifts, as follows: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing” (1 Cor 13:1-3 NKJV).

A lifestyle, rich in love and the other spiritual ingredients, has enormous power to melt prejudices, build bridges, remove barriers, or break down walls between the witness and his or her prospect. In this way, we can make the gospel more attractive within the church and in the eyes of the outsider than through sound arguments or even signs and wonders.

Notes

¹All scriptural quotations are taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

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Chapter 13

* * *

SYNCRETISM

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The Problem

Syncretism, the illegitimate mixing of non-Christian elements with Christian practices, is an old phenomenon predating the rise of Christianity. It has accompanied the history of the cross-cultural encounter of God's kingdom with the cultures and religious practices of humanity ever since sin entered human reality. In the Old Testament we encounter syncretism in the frequently condemned phenomenon of idol worship in Israel (2 Kgs 17:41) that led to such repulsive practices as human sacrifice (2 Chr 33:2, 3, 6) and religious prostitution (1 Kgs 14:24). In the New Testament implied syncretism is present in the subtleness of religious practices that tended to misrepresent God's true character, such as the treatment of the poor or terminally ill as punished by God (cf. John 9, and other passages). Jesus did not hesitate to confront these misconceptions even though he displayed a remarkable patience as the disciples continued to hold on to preconceived ideas (cf. Mk 10 and Jesus' interaction on the essence of servanthood and discipleship). It is this obscuring of the truth about God and his kingdom by religious ideas and practices of any culture that we call syncretism.

A review of the history of the mission of the Christian Church reveals that the church has always struggled to live faithfully to biblical truths in the cultural contexts she found herself in. Since God chose to share his love through the incarnation the gospel has been subject to a continuous process of translation and application in different cultural contexts. But this process of translation can allow the penetration of non-Christian elements into Christian practice and thinking which we call syncretism. To avoid this danger, conservative Protestant missionaries have tended to treat the cultural practices they often encountered as incompatible with the gospel and set out to replace them with new Christian practices. As time went on, however, it became clear that the wholesale rejection of cultural traditions had not really eradicated these traditions and practices; rejection had merely driven them underground. While openly adhering to the new standards set by those who had brought the good news, new converts practiced the old ways secretly and out of sight of church leadership.

Adventism is not exempt from this problem. Recently I visited a friend's home. One of the visitors had recently returned from South America where she and her child, who was not yet one year old, had visited relatives. During her stay the toddler had gotten ill, but mysteriously so, with no specific symptoms that her Western mind could easily read and deal with. In contrast, her hosts seemed to recognize the problem. They all agreed that her son had a case of "evil eye." The mother, who had grown up in the United States and had been educated to disregard such things as superstitious, did not know how to respond. So she took the child to a doctor to get a medical diagnosis and explanation of what was wrong. The doctor only confirmed what everybody else already knew. The child had no symptoms of a disease that could be cured with medicine. So what to do? In her distress she turned to local Adventist friends. Surely they would have an answer to this superstitious phenomenon of an evil eye. And they did, but it was not what she wanted to hear. They agreed with her and said, "We don't believe in these things anymore," but they counseled her not to dismiss the local remedy too quickly and maybe even give it a try, just to be sure. The ritualistic remedy consisted of taking a raw egg and rolling it over the back of the child to "absorb" the evil eye. That advice was too much for the mother who felt it was a non-Christian practice she did not want to participate in. In her distress she poured out her heart to God in prayer asking for his intervention in her child's "illness." As she watched her child become better as a result of her prayers her heart calmed down again.

But the incident left some confusing questions in her heart. How do you deal with what the locals called “evil eye”? No Bible class in college had ever mentioned such a problem, much less given instruction in how to answer the challenge of such phenomena. And why did local Christians not have a more Adventist answer to “evil eye”? Surely using a pre-Christian ritual to fight a mysterious power was not the right way to deal with this problem. But what was? That was her question as she shared her story in my friend’s living room.

The Significance of the Issue for Adventist Mission

Missionaries know about these problems and so do local pastors and leaders around the world. Since the Adventist Church strives to be faithful to the Scriptures in its teachings and practices, the presence of obvious syncretistic practices raises a number of questions about the origin of the problem and its possible causes. Why are loyal Seventh-day Adventists willing to engage in religious or quasi-religious practices that are incompatible with the gospel, such as, secretly sacrificing at the shrine of a local deity or visiting the local healer or a priest in times of sickness? To be sure, syncretism does not necessarily involve the practice of occult or spiritualistic ceremonies, but often it does. How are Adventists to regard such local practices which range from the superstitious to the eminently powerful? How do we as Christians deal with demonic activity? Moreover, does the Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy story have to be broadened to include some of these phenomena to speak more concretely to situations that involve the encounter with power issues?

Another reason why our discussion about syncretism today is so relevant is the fact that in trying to experiment with new approaches to reach the resistant populations of our times, the Global Mission Study Centers are easily subjected by critics to the charge of potentially promoting some kind of syncretism. This committee has had to carefully consider some of these charges, at least indirectly, by carefully formulating a number of documents which specify guidelines and safeguards against the loss of Adventist identity.¹

The same criticism has been leveled against recent Evangelical contextualized approaches to Muslims by the father of contextualized Muslim evangelism, Phil Parshall. Parshall has served as a missionary among Muslims in Asia for thirty-six years, has written several books on Islam,² and is recognized as a very responsible scholar on the subject of Muslim evangelism. His article entitled “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization” raises the question

if some contextualized approaches to Muslims cross the line into syncretism (Parshall 1998). That question has surfaced also in our own work and must be taken seriously.³

This paper attempts to understand why the multifaceted phenomenon of syncretism⁴ is an ever-present challenge accompanying the process of the cross-cultural communication of the Adventist message. In addition syncretism needs to be treated as a problem not only in former mission countries, but also in the West where dominant cultural influences contradicting the gospel may have become accepted in the church, even while the church seeks to avoid syncretism in the so-called mission fields. This presentation includes some suggested guidelines for how to deal with the problem of syncretism in responsible ways.

Syncretism As a Phenomenon

What is syncretism? And how does syncretism manifests itself? The traditional use of the term "syncretism" has been used to denote the illegitimate mixing of diverse cultural and religious elements with the essential truths of the gospel.⁵ By illegitimate mixing we mean that the cultural elements distort the meaning of the gospel. You may think of the phenomenon of Christo-paganism in parts of South and Central America resulting from the wholesale baptism of local religious practices and local deities by Roman Catholic Christianity or the African Independent Churches in Africa that blend Christian and non-Christian elements into a largely Christian framework or more eclectic systems where certain aspects of Christianity are selected and grafted into other religious systems, such as some new religions in Japan that use Christian weddings.

The term syncretism has also been used to recognize the way all religious systems are culture-based and interact naturally with existing religious and cultural systems.⁶ While this approach acknowledges the dynamic nature of the relation between Christianity and its many environments, it tends to treat all interaction of religion and culture as a syncretistic process; thus, it seems to suggest that a critical evaluation of this interaction is impossible or even illegitimate. Therefore, the term syncretism becomes relativistic and value-neutral and loses its evaluative strength. As responsible shepherds of a world-wide church community we cannot afford to ignore the inherent dangers of mixing

religious and cultural elements in a way that distort the truths of the eternal gospel. It is this potential distortion that concerns us here in this committee.

A more fruitful contribution has been the approach taken by Paul Hiebert and other evangelical scholars who point out that the hidden power of non-Christian traditions is rooted in the pervasiveness of holistic worldviews that control the dynamic interplay between cultural beliefs and practices. The staying power of these worldviews is often underestimated by missionaries steeped in a Western modern worldview who are unable to decipher the deep cultural assumptions about reality in folk religions. The result is a split-level Christianity where people embrace Christian practices for their outward religious life while continuing their old ways that give them the fundamental answers to every day life questions.⁷

In the book *Understanding Folk Religion* Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou point out that the problem of syncretism persists because old religious practices condemned by the missionaries fulfill a vital role in the life of the people that often goes unnoticed by the Western missionary. They insist that traditional beliefs (e.g., the belief in the living dead or ancestors, or belief in local spirits) are not just "superstitions" to be laid aside when exposed to Western formal logic. Instead these folk religions have their own "logic" that helps people in at least four different ways. First, they bring meaning to explain life and the devastating impact of death. Second, they help define what a good life is and deal with the crises and misfortunes of life. Furthermore, they help people plan their lives and overcome the problem of the unknown. Finally, these beliefs provide a way to deal with people's longing for justice and morality, while accounting for the presence of evil and oppression (Hiebert et al. 1999:93-228).

These beliefs are deeply rooted in worldviews and expressed in and reinforced through behaviors, and in rituals and institutions through symbols. When this connection between worldview, beliefs, and practice is not understood by those who bring Christianity to people living within religious contexts influenced by folk religions (which includes most non-Christian religions at the street level as well as traditional religions) new Christians often turn to traditional practices in times of crisis, which is syncretism!

Dealing With Traditions

How then can the many beliefs, traditions, and practices encountered by the Christian witness be dealt with in a way to avoid syncretism? Traditionally,

two common responses have been to either reject all old cultural customs as pagan, or embrace them uncritically and allow them in the church. The first approach has often been taken by conservative Christians who are eager to protect the integrity of the gospel. The second response has often been practiced by missionaries wishing to respect the local people and their cultural heritage. Thus, the two approaches start at opposite ends of the culture-gospel spectrum. Why then do both approaches seem to lead to the same problem of syncretism—secret syncretism through split-level Christianity in the first instance, and open syncretism in the second?

Improper Responses to Culture Cause Syncretism

Wholesale **rejection** of old cultural ways → Syncretism through split-level Christianity

Uncritical **acceptance** of old cultural ways → Syncretism through blending of elements

When the cultural ways of a people are condemned and stamped out, the gospel enters the culture as a foreign expression of faith to which the local people attach their own worldview assumptions. Missionaries bring in both the surface-level practices as well as the deeper meaning systems associated with the Christian practices. But what happens when the Adventist message and its accompanying practices are imported wholesale? The result is a foreign religion that exists without a meaningful engagement of the local culture. Worship in such situations follows foreign patterns. Christianity becomes isolated from the local culture and thus loses its power to meaningfully challenge the culture. Local people often have difficulties connecting what happens in church to their everyday concerns. Practices disapproved of by the Christian witnesses often move underground where they exist parallel to accepted practices; thus, Protestants have discovered that wholesale condemnation of local cultures generates the very thing that this approach sought to avoid—syncretism.

The second approach does not even pretend to avoid syncretism and therefore does not concern us here as much. It should be pointed out, however, that while it is right to decry the resulting betrayal of the gospel, Protestant Christians often fail to see that this is the problem of Western Christians who have

come to accept a modern rationalistic worldview with all its limitations and contradictions.

The Way to Avoid Syncretism

Since both a wholesale rejection of culture (non-contextualization) and an uncritical acceptance of traditional culture (uncritical contextualization), do lead to syncretism, we need to ask, what then can be done to prevent syncretism? The third alternative is “to deal with the old beliefs and practices consciously through a process of “critical contextualization (Hiebert et al. 1999:21). This approach has been embraced by this committee in a document on contextualization (see chapter 5) that seeks to insure that communities stay faithful to the gospel while at the same time expressing their faith in culturally meaningful ways.

Critical contextualization includes a four-step process of (1) describing and analyzing the traditional beliefs and practices of a people, (2) developing a comprehensive understanding of the biblical principles involved in those practices, (3) critically evaluating the cultural manifestations and their meaning in the light of Scripture, and (4) developing transformative practices and ministries that help people to live as faithful followers of Christ. This approach upholds the truths and authority of the Bible, but acknowledges that God does not play favorites and shows a high respect for cultures.

This balance is backed up by Scripture itself. For instance, at Pentecost God orchestrated a remarkable communication event in a way that allowed each person to hear the gospel message in their heart language (Acts 2). God’s respect for culture is also present in the incarnation itself. Even the way biblical authors communicate the gospel show their concern to contextualize their message to their target audiences. Matthew writes for a Jewish audience and puts the emphasis on messianic prophecy, kingship, and divine titles (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:8). John addresses a Hellenistic audience and uses Greek concepts such as the *logos* that Greeks were familiar with (John 1). But in using the concept he imbued it with unique Christian meaning that actually opposed the Platonic misconception of the separation of the spiritual and physical worlds. “And the Word became flesh” (John 1:14) is John’s answer to the Greek misconception of God. In other words, there is critical contextualization that avoids syncretism (Terry, Smith, and Anderson 1998: 319).

The Process of Critical Contextualization

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
The old beliefs, rituals, stories, songs, customs, art, traditions.	Gather information and seek to understand.	Study the Bible about the event or tradition.	Evaluate the cultural practice in the light of the biblical teachings.	Create a new practice that helps believers to live faithfully.

Evaluation Options

Step 3				
Keep what is not unbiblical, such as clothes, transportation, local songs, etc.	Reject what is not becoming for a Christian. Let the locals be the judge about hidden meanings.	Modify to bring out a Christian meaning, e.g., using certain melodies.	Create a functional substitute for important cultural customs, e.g., certain funeral practices.	Add new rituals to express the new faith, e.g., communion or baby dedication.

Describing the process of critical contextualization should also help us to avoid mislabeling practices as syncretistic that are not. Some church members are quick to point out that the date of Christmas or Easter, or the Christmas tree all have pagan origins. The same could be said for the practice of bridesmaids at North American weddings (the false brides are sent in to absorb the "evil eye" and thus protect the real bride). Just because something has a pagan origin or is also used in non-Christian contexts does not make a tradition inherently incompatible with the gospel. What is important is the meaning that people at-

tach to a cultural form at the present time. Archeologists have long noted that the structure of the Hebrew sanctuary follows a pattern very familiar to people of the surrounding cultures. Yet God used this cultural form to lead his people to a greater appreciation of his character and the plan of salvation.

Missiological Implications

Syncretism is a complex problem that is compounded by many factors that cannot be tackled by missionaries alone. As the Adventist Church grows and develops in new areas it will discover that syncretism is an ever-present danger. Therefore, I would like to suggest that there are two additional factors that need to be strengthened in the Adventist Church to reinforce the church's response to syncretism. The first factor is our approach to evangelism and church growth, the second is the need for leaders that are trained in cross-cultural skills and awareness. Evangelism should be conducted in such a way that the gospel is translated adequately into culturally appropriate categories so that it can be understood, appropriated, and applied to the life context of the people and bring fruit.

Evangelism

Evangelism is the task of the whole church and rooted in the ministry of the local church. When evangelism is done under pressure for results there is a danger that the discipling process is cut short, thereby increasing the danger of syncretism. For this reason I suggest the following guidelines:

1. One reason for the slow growth of Adventism in non-Christian contexts is a well-meant but in most cases fatal assumption that methods successful in the West can be easily adopted to fit non-Christian contexts. Most of these methods used by outsiders use a "rejection model of culture" and are therefore a recipe for syncretistic churches.

2. The top-down approach to goal setting has led to abuses in evangelistic and baptismal methodology that lack the comprehensiveness needed to safeguard the church against syncretism. The Church needs to avoid putting undue pressures on evangelists, pastors, lay ministers, or leaders to seek quick baptisms without proper post-baptismal care.

3. New believers from non-Christian backgrounds do not loose their worldview assumptions just because they are baptized (see Acts 8: the example of Simon the Sorcerer who was baptized by Peter but misunderstood how the

Holy Spirit works). The conversion process needs to be seen as a growth process which has implications for the way we approach the evangelistic task.

4. Evangelism has to be done with discipleship in mind. Evangelists and leaders need to carefully consider the question, What does a mature believer look like in this cultural context? This process must be encouraged and promoted in order for it to take place. It is the responsibility of the local evangelist to initiate this process and not shortchange it by inappropriate shortcuts which tend to lead to syncretism.

5. Evangelism must communicate the gospel at the worldview level. It must meet people where they are and lead them to an encounter with the almighty God who demands our supreme allegiance. Seminaries should teach evangelism not only from a practice and belief perspective, but from a worldview transformation perspective.

6. Post-baptismal instruction is as important as bringing people into the church. Donald McGavran, in analyzing the phenomenal growth of the Adventist Church in Peru through people movements, comments that it was post-baptismal instruction that made the difference (McGavran 1980:163).

Leadership

The second factor to strengthen the Adventist response to the danger of syncretism is leadership with cross-cultural skills and sensitivity. The impressive growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to be undergirded by a growing base of leaders who understand the cross-cultural tensions within the church and who can give guidance to those working in different cultural contexts. I therefore affirm the practice of the General Conference to bring experienced international leaders into the top echelons of the church. In order to fully profit, however, from their cross-cultural perspective, they need to be properly prepared to use their experience in another culture to the benefit of the church. It is important to remember that :

1. Cross-cultural skills are acquired both by experience and by guided reflection and training.

2. Cross-culturally, skilled leaders can do much to help the church deal with the worldview roots of syncretistic practices around the world. They need to be made aware of and taught sensible approaches to deal with the problem. If, however, we ignore the problem we will reap the harvest of a weak church

susceptible to the overwhelming undercurrents of non-biblically shaped world-views flooding the church.

3. If the church is to benefit from the intercultural exchange of leadership experience and wisdom, it must provide leaders with intercultural training and times of intentional reflection. Besides helping leaders and their family personally cope with the multiple challenges of cross-cultural living, communicating, and leading, intentional training and reflection will also enable Adventist leaders to help the worldwide church in its struggle to understand and live out the meaning of obedience to the commandments of Christ, faithfulness to the gospel, justice and love for our neighbors, and all the many other areas of life that our generation in multiple contexts is called to serve.

4. As outsiders, General Conference international leaders can also help the Western Adventist Church deal with its blind spots towards Western culture. Cross-cultural leaders may also have the potential to help the Adventist Church escape some of the inherent limitation and confusions of the modern Western, and especially American culture which has remained normative for Seventh-day Adventist theology and practice. By providing an "outside" perspective non-Western leaders can provide a loving, yet critical voice to challenge us to greater faithfulness to the gospel in our own culture. At the same time they will also affirm the tremendous contributions of their own culture and help us listen to the questions and answers our brothers and sisters in other cultures are giving in their quest to appropriate the gospel in their generation.

5. Properly prepared bi-cultural leaders are possibly the most important component, not only to strengthen the visible bonds of unity in the church, but also to strengthen the conceptual structures that hold our church together as an international church.

These guidelines should provide a strong starting point in avoiding syncretism as the Global Mission Study Centers enable the Adventist Church to reach the remaining unreached peoples.

Notes

¹See the relevant documents of the Global Mission Issues Committee: "Contextualization as Part of the Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," voted by the 1998 Annual Council, see *Annual Council Minutes* 1998; also "Adventist Contextualized Communities" and "Transitional Adventist Structures."

²See especially *Beyond the Mosque* and *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

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³More recently Eugene S. Heideman has suggested that the terms syncretism and contextualization have often been used as “power words” designed to discredit or legitimize innovative approaches to integrate faith and culture.

⁴For a history of the term see Rudolph, K. 1979. Syncretismus–vom theologischen Scheltwort zum religionswissenschaftlichen Begriff. In *Humanitas Religiosa, Festschrift F. Harolds Biezais*. Stockholm, 194ff; Levinskaya, Irina A. 1993. Syncretism: The Term and Phenomenon. *Tyndalle Bulletin* 44 (May); Schineller, Peter. 1992. Inculturation and Syncretism: What Is the Real Issue? *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16 (April); and Schreiter, Robert J. 1993. Defining Syncretism: An Interim Report. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 17 (April). Also Visser ‘t Hooft, Willem Adolph. 1963. *No Other Name; the Choice between Syncretism and Christian Universalism*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, and Visser ‘t Hooft, Willem Adolph. 1976. Evangelism in the Neo-Pagan Situation. *International Review of Mission* (1976): 83.

⁵See Kraemer, Hendrik. 1956. *Religion and the Christian Faith*. London, UK: Lutterworth Press. Conn, Harvie M. 1984. *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Trialogue*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan; and Moreau, A. Scott. 1999. Syncretism. In *Evangelical Dictionary of Missiology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶See for example Stewart, Charles, and Rosalind Shaw, eds. 1994. *Syncretism/ Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*. London, UK: Routledge.

⁷The term “split-level Christianity” was coined by Father Jaime Bulatao who according to Hiebert referred to it in 1962, and later elaborated on the concept in Bulatao, Jaime C. 1992. *Split-Level Christianity*. Manila: Ateneo de Manila, Cf. Hiebert, Paul G., R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou. 1999. *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

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Chapter 14

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CONNECTED TO CULTURE, CONFORMED TO CHRIST: EXPLORING ALTERNATE FORMS OF WORSHIP

G. T. NG

April 11-12, 2001

Human language is not static; it is subject to change from time to time. For example, no one sleeps in church anymore. He is just "rationing consciousness." No one is tall anymore. She is said to be "vertically enhanced." No one is short anymore, just "vertically challenged." Worship isn't dull anymore. It's "liturgically challenged."

The mode of worship is a pressing issue in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Since the office of Global Mission was established, the Adventist Church has grown by leaps and bounds. The emphasis has been to reach the unreached, especially the people groups located at the 10/40 window. When the Global Mission office was established in 1990, there were 2,300 groups of one million people without an Adventist presence. In 2001, however, most of these people groups have been penetrated and only 460 groups remain in which there is no Seventh-day Adventist presence. In 1990, twenty-seven countries were yet unentered. In 2001, however, there are only nine unentered countries.

The exponential expansion of the church has brought about great rejoicing on one hand, and growing pains on the other. One major task has been the

challenge of making the gospel meaningful to new converts. In many parts of the world, Christianity is still equated with Western culture because local cultural expressions of Christianity have often been rejected in favor of the more "enlightened" Western forms. Converts are often ostracized from their families or tribes. The newly planted churches have not had the know-how to adapt, modify, or replace the foreignness of the gospel. How should the Adventist Church respond to the fact that churches around the world are often copies of the churches that planted them? Since these churches are foreign within their own contexts, what can be done to reduce the discontinuity between culture and the gospel?

The purpose of this paper is to discuss issues pertaining to contextualization with special reference to corporate worship.

Facing the Challenge

The need to contextualize the gospel in each local culture has been a growing emphasis in the Christian churches during the past four decades. For example, the All Africa Conference of Churches in Ibadan in 1958 affirmed that "while the church cannot give Christian content to every African custom, we believe that the church throughout Africa has a very rich contribution to make to the life of the world church" (Ariarajah 1994:12). In other words, not all culture is bad. Cultural considerations should become part and parcel of the life and ministry of the church.

Scholars look at contextualization from different perspectives. Pobee examines it from an African point of view and appeals for the contextualization of the gospel in such African ritual forms as using drums, songs, and xylophones in liturgy. He believes that a contextual approach to worship that emphasizes not only the intellectual, but also the emotions and values will greatly enhance the effect of worship on worshippers (1996:39, 40).¹

Many agree to the need of contextualization, but not all agree on what constitutes the "right" approach. Issues relating to contextualization are complex. Discussions on such matters are likened to the opening of a "Pandora's box" of vexed hermeneutical issues much debated today.

This paper will first discuss the three approaches to contextualization described by leading missiologist Paul Hiebert (1988:184), followed by a study on the process of critical contextualization. Attention will then be paid to the characteristics of biblical worship as informed by Scripture. The relationship

between worship and contextualization is deliberated next, followed by practical suggestions on making worship more culturally relevant and biblically authentic.

Rejection of Contextualization

Hiebert describes a first approach which is often a rejection of any type of contextualization. Some missionaries tend to reject most of the old customs and label them as pagan. Funeral rites, modes of worship, dress, food, dances, and ceremonies are often condemned because they are related to traditional religions.

The wholesale rejection of the old creates serious theological and missiological problems. First, such rejection is based on the presupposition that the missionary's culture is superior to that of the host culture. The assumption is that the imported Christian culture (Western) is the normative culture and should therefore serve as a yardstick by which other cultures are measured.

In many Asian countries, however, it is almost impossible to separate culture from traditional religions (Schreiter 1985 and Whiteman 1997:2-7). Giving up cultural practices means to live outside the culture. Hence, to become a Christian implies that one becomes an alien in one's own culture and a stranger in one's own homeland.

Second, the rejection of the old ways creates a cultural void which is often filled by foreign elements familiar to the missionaries. The outcome is that mats are thrown out in favor of pews, drums and cymbals are rejected in favor of piano and organ, and traditional customs and costumes are discarded and replaced by imported ones.

Third, attempts to abandon old traditions often fail. "Many missionaries have come to realize that an attempt to eradicate an undesirable custom may merely drive it underground or result in an undesirable reactionary behavior" (Paun 1975:208). The fact remains that traditional religions die hard. When suppressed, they merely go underground. Many times they are practiced alongside of Christianity, resulting in a syncretistic mix of Christian and non-Christian beliefs and practices. Believers see nothing wrong with attending church and seeking advice from fortune tellers. Many Latin Americans routinely combined the worship of the traditional African gods with the veneration of the saints.

Uncritical Contextualization

Hiebert describes a second approach as uncritical contextualization. Traditional practices are accepted into the church without prior examination. Such uncritical contextualization is based on the assumption that local cultures are good and desirable. Another assumption is that the Christian religion often comes in its foreign garb, and in order to minimize the dislocation and ostracism of new believers, local cultures should be retained and practiced.

Uncritical contextualization brings about two weaknesses. First, it overlooks the fact that not all cultural practices are biblically acceptable. Missionaries cannot turn a blind eye to such social ills as slavery and female circumcision. The gospel is an agent of change, but uncritical contextualization denies the prophetic function of the church.

Second, uncritical contextualization also leads to syncretism. Since local culture is not scrutinized under the spotlight of biblical truth, chances are that some of the practices are combined with Christian beliefs, thus forming a syncretistic religion.

Critical Contextualization

Hiebert's recommended approach is critical contextualization. Old beliefs and customs are neither rejected nor accepted uncritically, but are to be objectively assessed against the norm of biblical truth.

How should critical contextualization be carried out? Hiebert suggests a four step process (1988:186, 187).

First, recognize the need to contextualize on the basis of biblical norms. The attitude should be one of impartiality, either to the host culture or the Christian culture.

Second, identify the areas of contextualization. These include rites relating to birth, death, and marriage and also include ceremonies, music, and songs. The purpose is to understand the deep meaning in the cultural element, not to pass value judgment on them or on any aspect of the cultural heritage (at this point in the process).

Third, conduct Bible studies on the areas under consideration. Sound hermeneutical principles should be employed to ensure an accurate rendition of biblical texts as they apply to present contexts.²

Fourth, make a decision to stop or continue certain practice after critical appraisal of the practice in the light of biblical texts.

This four-step process of critical contextualization should involve the people concerned. They have an intimate knowledge of their culture and under the guidance of trained missionaries, are in a position to critique their cultural practices. Local people are the ones who will make the decision and enforce the decision. Changes cannot take place without their approval. What happens when missionaries do not agree with the choices the people have made? Hiebert's suggestion is that the people should be given the benefit of the doubt and the freedom to make mistakes since such freedom is really part of the process for growth and development of an indigenized church.

The ownership of local people in the process of contextualization is in line with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. God's people make up the church. Each is accessible to God and is accessible by God through the Holy Spirit. Norman Kraus argues that ultimately the task does not solely depend on the missionary or the people, but on the church as a "discerning community." Hermeneutically the missionary is better trained, but culturally, the people have the edge. It is the joint venture between the two.

The outcome of the evaluation exercise may have different consequences. One possibility is to retain beliefs and practices not antithetical to the Scriptures (example: wearing Western attire). Other practices may be rejected as unchristian (example: prenuptial living together of the engaged couple). Still other practices may be modified to give Christian meaning (example: substituting secular lyrics with Christian ones in popular songs). Sometimes new rituals that are not biblically offensive may also be added.

What Contextualization Is Not

While contextualization is acutely needed in new churches, I-to Loh cautions that it can be misunderstood by those who do not fully understand its nature. For example, he maintains that contextualization is not revivalism (1990:293-301). Contextualization is not a revival of native culture without evaluation. It is not a flaunting of tradition and its value system. It is not a pretext to vent nationalistic sentiments. It is also not an attempt to force others to accept old traditions. Proper contextualization is retaining native culture agreeable with the Scriptures, capitalizing the elements relevant to its modern context, and identifying points of agreement for the communicating of the gospel message. Loh also maintains that contextualization is not exclusivism. Contextualization does not necessarily reject anything and everything "foreign."

Rather, it is an effort to open one's mind and heart to other cultures and appreciate other forms of Christian expression of faith and music in those cultures.

Worship and Culture

As a diverse church with many cultures, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has prided itself as an international church. People from different parts of the world worship in many different ways. The Indian style of worship music, for example, may sound strange to people from Latin America. The more flamboyant and upbeat form of Caribbean worship may make believers from a high-church tradition uncomfortable. The great diversity of worship styles elicits questions on the relationships between culture and worship. Is worship culturally conditioned in the first place? Is there such a thing as a biblical core in worship that transcends time? To answer these questions, one needs to examine the history of worship in the Old and New Testament eras.

Characteristics of Biblical Worship

A perusal of sacred history brings out four characteristics of worship: diversity, continuity, particularity, and liberty.

First, biblical worship was characterized by diversity. The notion of a uniform worship pattern in the Bible is a myth. The Old Testament worship, for example, was typified by the interplay of four institutions: the exodus, the temple, the synagogue, and the festivals (Webber 1982:24, 25). The exodus and the subsequent events in Sinai highlighted worship in which God entered into a covenant relationship with the Hebrew people (Exod 19-24).³ The Jewish temple worship called attention to the presence of God as well as the sacredness of time and ritual. Temple worship also signified a separation of the Jews from the surrounding nations and was a symbol of God's relationship to his unique people. The synagogue was an intertestamental institution that became the center of religious, educational, and social life of the Jews. It had no sacred ritual but focused on prayers and the reading and understanding of God's Word (Millgram 1971:89-120). The Jewish festivals provided assurance of God's continued provisions and presence.

Second, biblical worship was characterized by continuity. The Jewish festivals provided a sense of continuity of God's work from the past to the present. The New Testament worship was influenced by temple worship in that Christians continued to keep the temple hours of prayer (Acts 3:1) and to use the

temple as a place for preaching (Acts 3:11-26; 4:12-13, 19-26, 42). Christians also transferred the basic elements (Word, prayer, and sacraments) of synagogue worship to Christian worship, thus maintaining the legacy of synagogue worship.

Third, biblical worship was characterized by particularity. Though worship was diverse in nature while maintaining continuity from past history, it was nevertheless unique in each time period. The Old Testament worship was centered on Sinai, but the New Testament worship was rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The New Testament worship was distinctive in the sense that Christ reinterpreted temple worship as pointing to himself. The cleansing of the temple, for example, signified the end of temple worship. The early Christians worshipped in continuity with the past until they were caught in the tension between being Jewish and Christian. Then changes gradually occurred (Martin 1974 and Werner 1970). The Hellenistic Christians in particular, were keen to abolish Jewish rituals in favor of a new emphasis on the fulfilled meanings of those rituals. For example, Jesus the Passover Lamb had been sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7), and the Temple was replaced by the Body of Christ (1 Cor 3:16, 17). In addition, house churches appeared, especially among Jewish Christians (1 Cor 16:19, Col 4:15), thus signifying a further break from the past (Cullmann 1973:9, 10).

Fourth, biblical worship was characterized by liberty. The Hellenistic Christians preferred the freedom of expression and brought worship to new heights by speaking in tongues. Paul had to caution them that freedom of worship should not become unbridled chaos to the derision of unbelievers. Rather, it should be balanced with the necessity of order (1 Cor 14) as well as content by way of exercising large varieties of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12, 14).

These four characteristics of diversity, continuity, particularity, and liberty underscore the fact that the traditions of worship are historically and culturally conditioned. Worship did not evolve from a cultural vacuum, but was rooted in its respective context. Yet the contextual nature of worship should be recognized alongside with its transcendent quality. Authentic biblical worship transcends time and space. The challenge of contextualization is to determine which aspects of worship are transcendent and which are not.

Worship and Contextualization

Contextualization of worship appears to be a felt need in the Adventist Church today. For worship to be meaningful to believers, worship has to be relevant to the local culture. The challenge has been the localization of biblical worship. As noted above, biblical worship is not context-free. Biblical worship, as we understand it, comes with its own cultural baggage. Is it possible to separate this cultural baggage from the core of biblical worship? If it is possible to do this, is it desirable?

Normative biblical worship involves several essential features: content, structure, and context (Webber 1982:56). The content of biblical worship is the life, death, resurrection, and second coming of Jesus Christ. The structure of biblical worship includes the centrality of Scripture, prayer, and Lord's Supper, and the context in which worship takes place is the church called by God to worship and to witness to the contemporary world.

The content of worship is the non-negotiable part of worship. Without that content Christian worship becomes just another religious ceremony.

The structure of worship is another imperative, but the form in which the structure is delivered may be different from culture to culture. Caution should be taken to ensure that the meaning of the structure of worship remains compatible to biblical norms. The medieval church, for example, retained much of the basic structure of worship, but the meaning of worship to both the clergy and laity underwent fundamental changes. Worship became a mystery through the separation of sacred and profane and the use of Latin as the language of the Mass. The forms of worship became paramount and worship became an end rather than a means.

The context of worship varies according to locality. For worship to be meaningful to believers, worship should be packaged in a contextual mode familiar to them. However, worship is not to be accommodated to cultural norms. A rock band is a usual part of the cultural landscape, but would the presence of a rock band in worship constitute accommodation to cultural norms? Many Buddhist temples have prayer wheels—drums with the text of prayers written on the outside. In Buddhist thought, a prayer is said to be made by the simple act of spinning a prayer wheel. Would the installation of a prayer wheel in an Adventist Church in Sri Lanka be considered an enhancement to prayer or an accommodation to prevailing culture?

Inasmuch as Christianity is often perceived as a Western religion, much can be done to contextualize the forms of Christian worship. For example, chanting is a way of life for the Buddhists.⁴ Chanting Qur'anic verses is also a daily occurrence for Muslims. Should Christian chanting be encouraged as a form of adoration in worship in place of the traditional Scripture reading?

Posture of worship is another concern. Believers with an Islamic background are more at home with sitting on prayer mats. Could prayer mats be used instead of pews and chairs? How about praying with uplifted hands like the Muslims or folded hands like the Buddhists?

How about musical instruments? Should local instruments be used? How about composition of hymns by indigenous artists? The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) is one of the foremost organizations pioneering contextualization of church music in Asia. Through the years the CCA has published hymnals in the local vernacular and style. However, it has found that while Asian hymns exist, many believers enjoy singing English hymns more than their own. Singing foreign-sounding hymns is perceived to be more "fashionable" than singing native hymns. Perhaps this is due to a low regard for non-Western culture and a lack of respect for third-world cultures. Local hymns, however, are more effective in expressing ethnic character and communicating the gospel to local people.

How about the time of worship? Adventist worship is more structured, quite unlike the traditional pattern of Hindu or Buddhist spirituality. Adventists have membership rolls and times and days of worship. Aside from these stipulated times of worship, our worship centers remain closed, quite in contrast to the spontaneous pattern of worship typical in India or Myanmar. In this respect, the Roman Catholic Church has structured itself more closely to the local cultural pattern than the Adventist Church. First, worshipers may come and go, even on a Sunday morning. Second, Roman Catholic Church buildings are often kept open during the day and worshipers have easy access to worship. Third, besides church buildings, Roman Catholic worship services are routinely conducted in such places as shopping malls and airports where people congregate.

Conclusion

Contextualization as a felt need of the church should increasingly become part of the consciousness of Adventist mission. The remarkable growth of the

church in newly entered areas necessitates the formation of such a consciousness. Perhaps more importantly, the Body of Christ should translate that consciousness into a present reality. The process of contextualization in the area of worship should be painstakingly initiated and followed. To do so would require an intimate knowledge, not only of the meanings of the local cultural forms, but of the theological assumptions upon which they rest.

In the final analysis, God's view of worship is more inclusive than we think. In fact, worship in God's economy is all-encompassing, embracing all nationalities. "Twice the New Testament book of Revelation stresses that representatives of 'every race, language and nation' will be privileged to worship at the great and final gathering before the throne of God (Rev 5:9 and 7:9). In the searching light of this apocalyptic vision it is evident that God not only accepts but rejoices in the varieties of race, culture and language of the people that have committed themselves to him" (Wilson-Dickson 1992:13).

Notes

¹Pobee suggests three preliminary guidelines for the discussion between the gospel and culture. First, it must be biblical. It must begin with the revelation of God, that he has revealed himself through Christ and through the Bible as the primary source for instruction and correction. Second, it must be apostolic. Seeking to contextualize the gospel does not mean a discontinuity with the apostles. Much can be learned from the disciples who have gone before us. Third, it must be catholic. It must be universally applicable throughout the globe. It must transcend time and culture (Pobee 1998:49-51).

²In seeking to develop a missional hermeneutic that is multicultural, Brownson argues that the presence of God is potentially available in any given culture. While the gospel calls all people to repentance, it does not obliterate the contours of specific cultures. Since categories derived from Hellenistic philosophy were used to express the essence of the gospel in its context, he concludes that "there is a powerful line of development within the canon of Scripture that sanctions and encourages diverse expressions of Christian faith while maintaining a sense of coherence surrounding certain core assumptions regarding the character and purpose of God" (Brownson 1996:2).

³Exod 24:1-8, in particular, outlines the characteristics of authentic worship. First, God initiated the call to worship. The people assembled before him. Second, worship was a participatory event in which God and people interacted. Third, worship was depicted by the proclamation of God's Word. God spoke to his people and made his wishes known. Fourth, worship involved personal commitment.

The people accepted the covenant with all its conditions. They were committed to obedience. Fifth, worship was rectified by a blood sacrifice, pointing to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. This rectification precipitated in the Lord's Supper in the New Testament.

⁴Japanese Buddhist ceremonial music includes the *shomyo* ritual based on the Vedic Indian chant similar to the Gregorian chant. *Shomyo* cantillations are sung in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Japanese. See "Sacred Buddhist Chant of Japan," *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia* 2001. © 1993-2000 Microsoft Corporation.

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Chapter 15

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADVENTISTS AND ADHERENTS OF ANIMISTIC RELIGIONS

RUSSELL L. STAPLES

April 11-12, 2001

Introduction

Animistic religions¹ are broadly similar in spite of the fact that each society has its own set of deities and spiritual beings. Perhaps the defining characteristic of animistic religions is their sacral worldview. In contradistinction to our Western mechanistic concepts of causality, it is believed that spirit forces pervade reality and control almost everything that happens. No clear boundaries are placed between spiritual and natural causes.

Animistic religions differ from world religions in several ways. They seldom have sacred writings or developed systems of belief and ethics or great spiritual founding fathers. The cycles of religious rites center about rituals of the life cycle, such as initiation into adulthood, marriage, induction into high office, funerals, and induction into the spirit world; the great rituals of the cosmic cycle such as rain-making, harvest, first fruit ceremonies, celebrations, and rituals of protection in times of calamity and danger.

Relationship Between Adventism and Adherents of Animistic Religions

Conversations and relationships with animists follow a different pattern from those with representatives of the world religions for several reasons.

Christianity has historically had its greatest successes among animists. To this proclivity must be added the fact that the radical change now taking place in many tribal societies is undermining the social/cultural systems that have supported animism. Apart from relatively rare renewal movements in animistic religions, transition is taking place along two axes: either toward one of the world religions or in the direction of secular materialism. This is thus an era of missionary opportunity among the animistic peoples of the world.

There is generally no developed theological system in animism which functions as a powerful contrary belief system dominating relationships with other religions. A tendency toward a tentative inclusivism rather than opposition has marked the attitude of animists toward the world religions. Animists generally experience little difficulty in adding new deities and doctrines to their panoply of powers and worldview.

The conversation with Christianity is inevitably colored by the very different *intentionalities* of the two religions. Christianity, in this case the *Great Tradition*, centers upon God and the life to come, whereas the animistic Folk Religions, usually called the *Little Tradition* in inter-religious conversations, have to do with life here and now—good health, productivity in family, the provision of food, protection from earthly ills, and shelter from malevolent spiritual beings and forces.

Some Points of Contact for Presentation Of the Adventist Message

There are concepts of a Creator God in most animistic traditions, however, the “otiose high God” of these religions is distant and rarely involved in daily life. These beliefs are inculcated in local myths of creation, in the separation of human beings from the Creator God and in the origin of death. In many societies there are also flood myths; thus, the first few chapters of Genesis fall upon somewhat familiar ground and may be used to awaken interest. The clarity of the Genesis accounts of the fall and portrayal of the great God in search

of Adam and Eve make a positive impression and prepares the way for the presentation of the gospel.

Sacrifices and libation offerings, which constitute a tangible means of establishing relationships with the spirit world, are a central feature of the major religious rituals of most animistic peoples. Thus the Old Testament sanctuary service with its system of sacrifices strikes a familiar cord and opens the way to an understanding of the vast significance of the death of Christ as the universal sacrifice, and of his priestly ministration in the heavenly sanctuary.

Animists live in a world that is constantly torn by tension between the forces that promote their good and well-being and those that are malevolent. And, for them, it is these spirit forces that largely control reality. This worldview constitutes a congenial mind-set for acceptance of the very much grander picture of the God of the Scriptures, of his immanence and availability to human beings as well as of his transcendence, and of his victory over evil at the cross. The Great Controversy theme may thus be introduced as an enlargement of their worldview.

Summary and Conclusion

To the surprise of some, discoveries arising from relationships with animists point in two directions: to the Christian as well as to the animist. Immersion in the sacral world serves to reveal the unconscious inclination of the average Western Christian toward a rational secularism and the convinced animist who detects this may come to regard the Christian as a kind of half-believer.

On the other hand the ease, without serious pangs of conscience, with which the convert to Christianity may slip into a dual relationship in which recourse is alternately had to the *Great* and *Little* traditions, depending on the needs of the moment, comes as a surprise to the Western Christian who thinks in terms of a mutually exclusive affiliation. The consciousness of animists of the availability of a *revelatio continua* via a diviner to resolve the difficulties of everyday life constitutes a well-nigh, irresistible attraction. When all is not going well recourse may be had to a diviner or shaman who can establish contact with the spirit world and reveal the spirit or forces that are the cause of a difficulty and advise regarding appropriate ritual. The failure of some Christian groups in animistic societies to understand and address such issues has not infrequently resulted in a dual allegiance in which the enthusiastic convert, while rejoicing

in the hope of the gospel, reverts to the practice of the traditional religion in order to cope with religious fears and practical difficulties.

Notes

¹Whereas a single name serves to designate each of the world religions, there appears to be no general consensus regarding the term which best defines animistic religions. "Animism," which derives from the Latin *anima*, meaning spirit or soul and which seemed appropriately descriptive of the sacral spirit world of primal societies, was the term generally employed by early scholars of religion. This term has fallen into disfavor because it is an inadequate designation of the many deities and Creator Gods believed in by two-thirds of tribal societies. Other terms such as primal, sacral, tribal, primitive, traditional, and folk religion have come into use. Barrett employs the term "ethnoreligionists" which he defines as: "Followers of a non-Christian or pre-Christian religion tied closely to a specific ethnic group, with membership restricted to that group; usually animists, polytheists or shamanists" Barrett, David B. et al. 2001. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2d ed. New York: Oxford University Press 1:28. Barrett gives the number of ethnoreligionists as 228 million present in 142 of the world's 238 countries and lists the major groups in table 7-5, 2:11, 12. The Animistic worldview remains alive among the popular religions in the world. This is the case in Buddhism, Hinduism, and also in some forms of Islam and Christianity in the two-thirds world. The adjectival use of the term "Animism" has regained favor and is used here as an assigned subject heading.

Chapter 16

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2001 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor's Note: At the conclusion of each year's Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2001 five recommendations were prepared dealing with the centrality of Christian community to world mission, spiritual power confrontations, syncretism, alternate forms of worship, and the relationship between seventh-day Adventists and secular people.

Centrality of Christian Community to World Mission

Recommended 12 April 2001

Because of sin, humans are by nature separated not only from God but from each other. The human family has been fractured, and in this fractured state community does not occur naturally. It has to be intentionally cultivated and sustained.

One of the last prayers offered by Jesus before his crucifixion was that his followers might be one as he and the Father are one. He listed as the identifying mark of true believers that they would have love for one another. Christ's model of Christianity involves not only a relationship with our heavenly Father but necessarily includes relationships that build an earthly community.

As the vehicle of God's redemptive concern, the Christian community functions in two important and integrated forms. As the gathered community it meets for fellowship and nurture to sustain its internal life. As the scattered community it is sent into the world to witness to the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The integrity and vitality of its witness depends on how well the community exemplifies Christ.

1. To fulfill God's purpose, Christian community must be rooted in the unconditional love of God for everyone.
2. It must be inclusive and open to all.
3. It must provide an environment where people are free to acknowledge weakness and eager to listen to and encourage each other without incrimination.
4. It must provide accountability for Christian growth.
5. It must work to overcome all forms of prejudice, discrimination, and injustice inside and outside of the Church.
6. It must see itself as an experiment in grace, where God's vision for humanity is being lived out now.
7. Its worship patterns, decision-making, structure, and programs must utilize the strengths and meet the needs of the diverse ethnic, racial, gender, age, and socioeconomic groups represented in the community.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we must view ourselves as part of the larger Christian community, recognizing our common spiritual heritage, and seeking to interact in a manner that shows respect despite theological differences.

Community is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to foster the whole mission of the church, which includes both outreach and nurture. We must avoid a spirit of superiority, recognizing that, as Jesus stated, God's true followers can be found in many folds. Christian community will lead believers to stand in solidarity with all people with whom they interact, never losing sight of the oneness of all humanity.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Statement on Spiritual Power Confrontations

Recommended 12 April 2001

Seventh-day Adventists have long recognized the cosmic conflict between the powers of good and evil. Although Christ defeated Satan at Calvary, the great controversy between Christ and Satan continues every day in different ways in every part of the world. In the light of this very real battle, we affirm the following:

1. Satan and his evil angels (demons) exist. They are real personalities with supernatural power, "legion" in number, and organized for the purpose of degrading humanity and destroying God's influence in the world.

2. God as Creator has greater power than his created beings.

3. Jesus and his angels have greater power than Satan and his angels.

4. Satan cannot force the human will, and demon possession is ultimately the result of choices the victim or others make.

5. Demonic harassment or possession reveals itself in different ways in different cultures.

6. The casting out of demons is part of the ministry of the gospel and has two essential elements: using Jesus' name and exercising faith.

7. We need to follow the example of the apostles who, when confronted with demon possession, were ready to call on Jesus' authority for deliverance.

8. Spiritual discernment is needed to identify genuine possession. Not all strange or bizarre behaviors indicate the direct operation of Satan and his demons. Those in gospel work need education in spiritual power confrontations.

9. Victims who are delivered of demon possession need continued support.

10. Casting out demons may not always be successful. Failure may indicate that the victim has psychological rather than spiritual problems or indicate other hidden issues. Failure may also be the result of a lack of faith.

11. Those who cast out demons need to seek the support of the community of believers. In all cases, they must surrender to the sovereign will of God and give him the glory for each deliverance.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Syncretism

Recommended 12 April 2001

As the Church enters more non-Christian areas the question of syncretism, the blending of religious truth and error, is a constant challenge and threat. It affects all parts of the world and we must take the issue seriously. For Adventists this topic is highlighted by our understanding of the Great Controversy which helps us understand Satan's mode of operation of distorting and compromising truth, not by denying it, but by mixing truth and error, thus robbing the gospel of its true impact and power.

In this current situation a spirit-led, critical contextualization of all aspects of religion is a necessity. Only this process can preserve the power and effectiveness of the gospel. The diversity of cultures around the world makes it difficult to specify every practice or idea that needs to be addressed, but the key steps in a process of deciding where proper adaptation ends and fatal syncretism starts would include the following:

1. An examination of the specific issue in the light of all cultures and religions concerned. This would necessitate especially a careful analysis by cultural insiders of the significance of the particular practice or idea in question.

2. An examination of all that Scripture says about the issue or related issues by all cultures concerned. The implication of scriptural principles should also be carefully thought through.

3. In the context of reflection and prayer the local community of believers applies the scriptural insights to their situation. The process could have at least one of the following possible results:

- a. The practice or idea is accepted, because it is compatible with scriptural principle.

- b. The practice or idea is modified to make it compatible with Christian principles.

- c. The practice or idea is rejected, because it contradicts the principles of Scripture.

- d. The church develops a functional substitute for a cultural practice that fulfills an important need in that society.

- e. The church introduces a unique Christian practice that is required by Scripture, but has no correspondence in the culture (e.g., baptism).

4. The idea and practice is implemented carefully.

5. After a period of trial it may be necessary to evaluate the idea or practice or the decision made.

Before reading this statement, the General Conference statement voted by the Annual Council on "Contextualization in the Seventh-day Adventist Church" should be carefully studied. The statement on syncretism was designed as a complement to the statement on contextualization.

Contextualization and Syncretism

*Statement As Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Administrative Committee and As Edited by the Biblical Research Institute
June and July, 2003*

Contextualization is defined in this document as the intentional and discriminating attempt to communicate the gospel message in a culturally meaningful way. Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by the serious responsibility of fulfilling the gospel commission in a very diverse world. It is based on the authority of the Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit and aims at communicating biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way. In that task contextualization must be faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged by the gospel.

Intentional contextualization of the way we communicate our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it the Church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, adaptation has taken place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the Three Angels' Messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. This will continue to happen.

As the Church enters more non-Christian areas, the question of syncretism—the blending of religious truth and error—is a constant challenge and threat. It affects all parts of the world and must be taken seriously as we explore the practice of contextualization. This topic is highlighted by the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy between good and evil which explains Satan's mode of operation—distorting and compromising truth, not by denying it, but by mixing truth and error, thus robbing the gospel of its true impact and power. In this context of danger and potential distortion, critical contextualization is indispensable.

Since the effects of sin and the need for salvation are common to all humanity, there are eternal truths that all cultures need to know, which in some cases can be communicated and experienced in different and yet equivalent ways. Contextualization aims to uphold all of the Fundamental Beliefs and to make them truly understood in their fullness.

In the search for the best way to contextualize, while at the same time rejecting syncretism, certain guidelines must be followed.

a. Because uncritical contextualization is as dangerous as non-contextualization, it is not to be done at a distance, but within the specific cultural situation.

b. Contextualization is a process that should involve world church leaders, theologians, missiologists, local people, and ministers. These individuals should have a clear understanding of the core elements of the biblical worldview in order to be able to distinguish between truth and error.

c. The examination of the specific cultural element would necessitate an especially careful analysis by cultural insiders of the significance of the particular cultural element in question.

d. The examination of all the Scripture says about the issue or related issues is indispensable. The implications of scriptural teachings and principles should be carefully thought through and factored into proposed strategies.

e. In the context of reflection and prayer, scriptural insights are normative and must be applied to the specific cultural element in question. The analysis could lead to one of the following results:

1) The particular cultural element is *accepted*, because it is compatible with scriptural principles;

2) The particular cultural element is *modified* to make it compatible with Christian principles;

3) The particular cultural element is *rejected*, because it contradicts the principles of Scripture.

f. The particular cultural element that was accepted or modified is carefully implemented.

g. After a period of trial it may be necessary to evaluate the decision made and determine whether it should be discontinued, modified, or retained.

In the end, all true contextualization must be subject to biblical truth and bear results for God's kingdom. The unity of the global church requires regular exposure to each other, each other's culture, and each other's insights that "to-

gether with all the saints we may grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love" (Eph 3:18).

Alternative Forms of Worship

Recommended 12 April 2001

The General Conference Global Mission department has spearheaded the proclamation of the gospel in many unentered areas around the world. New congregations have been established. When these new congregations worship, however, they don't always worship in the same manner as do traditional Adventists. What can we say about these new worship "initiatives"? What guidelines can be provided to help new believers ascertain if their form of worship is biblically authentic and yet culturally relevant?

Corporate worship is God's people coming into his presence as the Body of Christ in reverence. They give honor and homage to him through adoration, confession, prayer, and thanksgiving. To evaluate worship, the following characteristics of biblical worship should be considered.

1. The content of worship should be similar to that of biblical worship as found in the Scripture. There should be continuity in terms of the basic ingredients of worship such as prayer, Scripture reading, songs of praise, and sacraments.

2. Worship style can vary according to its cultural context. Diversity itself is not inherently evil. In fact, diversity may become a cultural necessity.

3. Worship must conform to biblical norms. Freedom in worship should be accompanied by order, beauty, and reverence.

4. Worship style should be contextualized to make it meaningful to the worshiper. Areas of considerations may include music, instruments, order of worship, place of worship, posture of worship, etc. The following steps may be taken in contextualizing worship:

- a. Identify the areas of worship needing contextualization.
- b. Engage in Bible study to ascertain if the proposed change conforms to biblical norms.
- c. Make a decision to stop or continue a certain practice after critical appraisal of the practice in the light of biblical evidence.
- d. Retain the practice if it is not antithetical to the Scripture, reject the practice if it is found to be unbiblical, or modify the practice to make

it fully Christian. Sometimes new rituals that are not biblically offensive may be added.

Forms of Worship

*Statement As Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Administrative Committee and As Edited by the Biblical Research Institute
June and July, 2003*

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to come into contact with many different cultures in non-Christian countries, the topic of proper worship practices becomes very relevant. In those settings, deciding what is or is not acceptable in a Seventh-day Adventist worship service is important. Calling people to worship the only true God plays a significant role in the message and mission of the Church. In fact, in Adventist eschatology the central element in the closing controversy is the subject of worship and the true object of worship. We should be careful and prudent as we seek ways to contextualize Adventist worship around the world. In this task we should be constantly informed by the following aspects of Adventist worship.

a. God is at the very center of worship as its supreme object. When we approach God in adoration we come in contact with the very source of life, our Creator, and with the One who in an act of grace redeemed us through the sacrificial death of his beloved Son. No human being should usurp that divine right.

b. Corporate worship is God's people coming into his presence as the Body of Christ in reverence and humility to honor and give homage to him through adoration, confession, prayer, thanksgiving, and singing. Believers come together to listen to the Word, for fellowship, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to all, and to be equipped for the proclamation of the gospel. Our faith invites wholehearted and highly participatory worship where the Word of God is central, prayer is fervent, music is heartfelt, and fellowship in faith is palpable. These elements of worship are indispensable in Adventist worship services around the world and should be part of any attempt to contextualize Adventist worship.

c. We are complex creatures in which reason and emotions play a significant role. True worship expresses itself through our body, mind, spirit, and emotions. The Adventist Church calls for a proper balance of the involvement

of these aspects of our personality in worship. It is important to keep in mind that any element of the worship service that tends to place humans at its center must be rejected. The extent to which the body participates in worship will vary from culture to culture, but whatever is done should be done under discipline and self-control, keeping in mind that the central aspect of the worship service is the proclamation of the Word and its call to serve God and others.

d. Adventist worship should draw on the treasure trove of Seventh-day Adventist theology to proclaim with exuberance and joy the communion and unity of believers in Christ and the grand theme of God's infinite love as seen in creation, the plan of redemption, the life of Christ, his high priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary, and his soon return in glory.

e. Music should be used to praise him and not as a means to over stimulate emotions that will simply make individuals "feel good" about themselves. Through it worshippers should express their deepest feelings of gratitude and joy to the Lord in a spirit of holiness and reverence. Adventist worship is to celebrate God's creative and redemptive power.

If the need to contextualize the form of worship in a particular culture arises, the guidelines provided in the document entitled "Contextualization and Syncretism" should be followed.

A Statement of Relationship Between Seventh-day Adventists and Secular People

Recommended 12 April 2001

Seventh day Adventists affirm the freedom of all people to believe as they choose. While Seventh-day Adventist Christians hold to a theistic worldview that provides hope and a sense of purpose, we respect the freedom of others to have alternative views and lifestyles.

In solidarity with secular people, we affirm the legitimacy of the human quest for fulfillment. We affirm our belief that the Christian gospel centers on what it means to be fulfilled as a human being. Jesus Christ came into the world to deliver us from dehumanizing behavior and tendencies, and to transform us into actualized persons fully able to experience all that it means to be human. We recognize the potential of each individual and believe that all have the privilege and responsibility to work towards realization of that potential.

Seventh-day Adventists affirm the need to be culturally attuned and sensitive to the diversity of the human family. We deplore all forms of prejudice such as racism and inappropriate expressions of ethnocentrism. We honor diversity while seeking to model unity within the colorful mosaic of humanity.

Seventh-day Adventists share in the struggles and disappointments of the human family. In this context we affirm the need for authenticity and integrity in human relationships. Such authenticity enables a sense of empathy and realism and provides a constructive basis for interaction with others.

We affirm that the Christian faith is not merely a system of beliefs, but that it is also practical. Following Jesus Christ as our example, Seventh-day Adventist Christians work together with those who, in a spirit of altruism, seek to honor the rights of others, to ensure justice for all, and to work in appropriate ways towards the relief of suffering and oppression.

We confess that in our interaction with secular people, we, along with other Christians have sometimes been too ready with answers before pausing to listen to the questions. We affirm that Seventh-day Adventists wish to place a high priority on listening to the deepest concerns of all peoples, being sensitive to their needs and problems, and working alongside them in an attitude of service and humility.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

The 1990 General Conference session voted to establish a mission initiative called Global Mission that challenged the Adventist Church to do mission where there had been few successes in the past, to work for those in the major world religions instead of largely winning people who were already Christian, and to enter unentered areas where there were few if any Adventists.

Global Mission also established five religious study centers to pioneer new approaches for sharing the gospel with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and secular/postmodern peoples. The new approaches and challenges forced the Adventist Church to study and find solutions for many cross-cultural questions. In response to that challenge a yearly Global Mission Issues Committee was established where papers were read and recommendations made concerning current mission issues. *Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission*, Vol. I contains the Global Mission Issues Committee papers from 1998-2001.